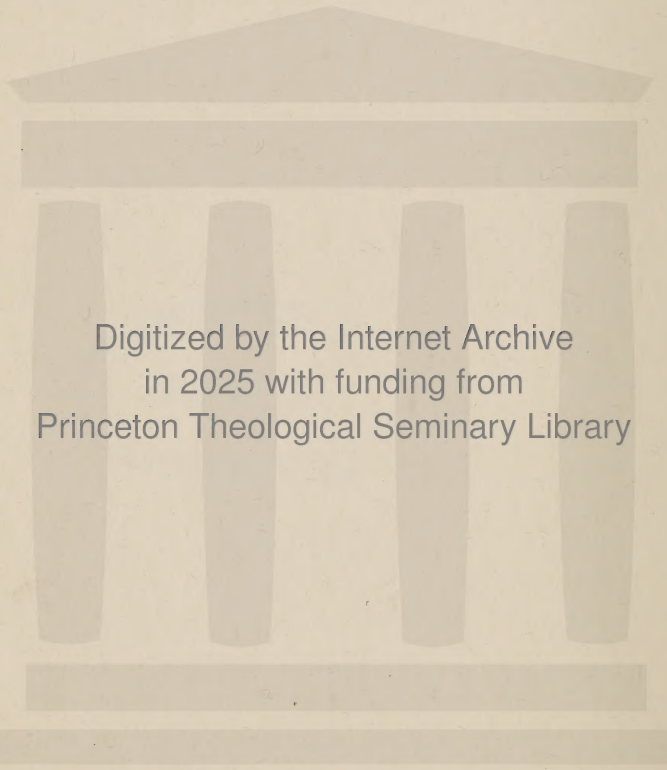
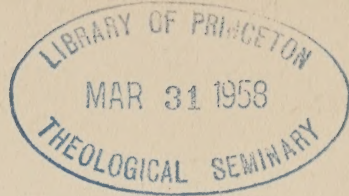


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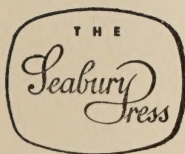
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Light
the Dark
Streets



Light the Dark Streets

by C. KILMER MYERS



GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT · 1957

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*For
Robert Baker Pegram
and
Paul and Jenny Moore*

Foreword

Prior to August of 1956 the Rev. C. Kilmer Myers, Vicar of the Lower East Side Mission of Trinity Parish, was a person whom I had not met, but whom I had heard about with increasing frequency in important circles with regard to his work on the Lower East Side, particularly among youth. On Wednesday, August 8th, a teenager fired a volley of shots, which injured two youths and which reverberated from an East Side street corner back and forth across the concrete canyons of New York City, extending to other parts of our country—even to several foreign capitals. Since that day I have spent as much time with Father Myers as I have spent, over the course of a professional career, with many of my other colleagues.

As Deputy Executive Director of the New York City Youth Board, with responsibility for the Board's street gang program, I, along with several aides, moved into the Lower East Side situation immediately after the shooting, to try to prevent the conflict from becoming a conflagration. After attending the first meeting of social agencies, civic groups and other community leaders, it was evident that the focal point for work with teenage gangs in the neighborhood was Father Myers' Parish. Therefore, in consultation with him, we immediately established field headquarters in St. Augustine's Vicarage. From that point on, during the next several weeks, Father Myers and I worked as closely together as is humanly possible. I saw him face to face, or talked to him by phone around the clock—all hours of the day and night. I worried with him when we weren't certain of our next move. I sat in silence with him while we were thinking through plans for the next day. I am certain that on many of those occasions, while I was struggling for a new or better idea, he not only was doing the same but he also was praying for wisdom for both of us.

Subsequently, through the combined efforts of the Mission staff, the settlements, the Police and the Youth Board workers, the immediate conflict situation was resolved and Father Myers and I turned our attention to our broader responsibilities. However, from that time to the present, both while at the Youth Board and in my present capacity at the BBM, I have been in constant touch with Father Myers about his work and mine. I have said the above to establish the fact that since August, 1956, I have gained an intimate knowledge of the work of the Lower East Side Mission and of Father Myers as a person.

The problem of the conflict street gang is a complex one. It represents a teenage peer group association which has developed a pattern of antisocial behavior, particularly street fighting and involving the use of lethal weapons. The members of these groups, usually, are socially and emotionally deprived youngsters who haven't been able to find meaningful roles for themselves at home, in school, on a job, on athletic fields, in the church or in neighborhood social activities. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that they band together out of their mutual needs for status or, in their language, 'rep.' This they achieve, in the tradition of the feudal lords, by becoming known as the toughest, roughest and baddest (sic) club in their block or neighborhood. By and large they are youngsters who have never had the opportunity to develop civilized values. Their codes in many ways are as primitive as those that governed the earliest clan society. An eye for an eye—a life for a life—are everyday rules of thumb for them.

Because the conflicts between such groups, of which it is estimated that there are approximately 75 in New York City, all too frequently result in severe bodily injury, and on occasions even death, the community has been vitally concerned about seeking solutions to this problem. The police, in carrying out their function of maintaining law and order, have established special units, which keep currently informed about the membership and *modus operandi* of the gangs. Thus, they are in a position frequently to prevent outbreaks of violence and swiftly to apprehend offenders when a crime has been committed. Social agencies, the schools, churches and the courts have developed specialized approaches to the problem. The largest and best known is the Council of Social and Ath-

letic Clubs of the New York City Youth Board which has 60 social workers assigned to conflict groups throughout the city. The social approach utilized by the Youth Board and the other agencies essentially involves sending a well qualified, understanding, friendly young man into the gang's own habitat to establish contact with them. This is a difficult process; but once achieved the workers earn the confidence of the boys involved. They then work with them, both as individuals and a group, toward helping them find normal satisfactions through constructive group activity, jobs, individual counselling and the like. The prime instrument that the workers use in this process is their own personality. They bring what these youngsters have not had in the past—namely, an acceptance and understanding from an adult who cares about them and who is always ready and willing to help. They are symbols of the adequate father figure in all that that implies, a kind of relationship which most of these boys have not experienced before. This approach is no longer experimental. While it is no panacea for juvenile delinquency, time after time during the past several years this method has brought back from the abyss many groups and individuals who have discovered their innate worth and found a dignity in the mainstream of human society.

Ideally, this is an overall community job which requires the close cooperation, on a neighborhood level, of the social agencies, schools, Youth Board, police, churches and civic groups. On New York's Lower East Side, through the Lower East Side Neighborhoods Association (LENA), this kind of teamwork has been achieved. The Lower East Side Mission is one of the

most active participants in LENA. Father Myers is Chairman of its Youth Division.

Now let's get down to cases. How does the Mission operate? Frankly, I am cramped for space to discuss this adequately. It would require a separate volume. However, I can point out some of its more important work in relation to conflict groups. First of all, Father Myers and his devoted clerical and lay associates are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. At 2:30 in the morning, at 2:30 in the afternoon, one can ring GRamercy 5-1090 and a ready, eager voice answers 'St. Augustine's Chapel.' Even more important perhaps than being at the telephone, these men and women are wherever they're needed by their kids—in homes, in courts, in dance halls, on street corners—anywhere a bewildered, upset kid needs them to be. The Vicarage itself literally teems with humanity. The Vicar's apartment is turned over nightly for teenagers to use for social activity which is not available to them in their own always crowded, and sometimes dismal, flats. In spite of the blaring turntable, the relaxed laughter and happy confusion, the staff always has the time to sit in a quiet corner and listen to a troubled youngster.

It is noteworthy that when one enters the Vicarage, he sees at once a simple, hand-printed sign which says, 'Let every guest be received as Christ.' This spirit pervades every nook and corner. There is no color line, no stress on religious difference, nothing that separates one human from another at St. Augustine's. On the contrary there is a warm, pervasive atmosphere of love, friendship and dignity for all. This is particularly significant in that the neighborhood is torn by ethnic conflict.

Obviously, Father Myers and his associates have, through their example, made St. Augustine's an integrated haven of warmth and acceptance—a place in fact quite different from the nearly empty, dreary building that was St. Augustine's just a few years back. Father Myers would say, however, that not he, but rather Christ working through him, his associates and his people, had made the difference.

Unquestionably, Father Myers' story is in the truest sense a love story. He is a carrier of love and is able to bring respect and affection all around him, particularly to the deprived young ones who need it most. Depending on one's orientation, one might debate whether Father Myers' love represents the highest form of development of the civilized human or whether, in addition, he is a transmitter of Christ's love. At any rate his love has transformed many young ones from a fruitless life of violence to a decent, richer, spiritual way. The tragedy is, however, that in this time of man's great inhumanity to man there are so few among us who have Father Myers' capacity to love enough so as to be able to influence positively the lives of others, particularly our young. In essence, what he has been able to do is to translate the Sermon on the Mount into his daily way of life. That, in brief, is the story of the Lower East Side Mission.

Needless to say, it has been, and is, a real privilege for me to work with Father Myers and to be his friend. And yes, to have some of his abundant love rub off on me.

JAMES E. MCCARTHY
Executive Director
Big Brother Movement

Preface

A quarter of a million people are crowded into the two square miles which make up the Lower East Side of Manhattan. They are of many racial and cultural backgrounds. Many like the Orthodox Jews have lived there for years. Others, like the Negroes and Puerto Ricans, have recently moved in.

Along the East River new low-income housing gives hope for the future, but it, too, creates tensions between the new and the old. Most of the area is still a blighted slum. Poverty, overcrowding, and poor recreational facilities combine to create a highly combustible atmosphere which makes the East Side neighborhoods nervous, belligerent and occasionally violent.

The Parish of Trinity Church has two chapels on

Henry Street in the heart of this human melting pot. Their programs are co-ordinated under one Vicar, who is the author of this book. It is an experience, never to be forgotten, to walk down Henry Street with Father Myers. He is known, loved and trusted by all kinds of people. He is the friend of those who are least understood, and he is the person many turn to when violence and fear engulf the community.

In this book a great priest describes how the emotions and minds of a few underprivileged adolescents work under the tensions of searching for security and acceptance. Behind the story of one gang and its members, you will also catch a glimpse of how the love of Christ, working through His Church, is able to help 'Light the Dark Streets.'

JOHN HEUSS
Rector of Trinity Parish,
New York City

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Light
the Dark
Streets

Prologue

This is a story of a people and their parish. It is not a pretty story: there is violence and brutality and lust in it. But there are flashes of human love incredibly beautiful, too. And beneath each of these breath-taking glimpses can be sensed a deathless love—that which is pictured in the cross of Jesus Christ. The struggle to transmit this greater love to the daily and individual lives of people—this is the matrix out of which our story is born.

When you cross any one of the three great bridges which span the lower East River, you will see where our people live. You can look down upon the high-rising

buildings of the housing projects and cooperatives; and, along side them, the 'old-law' tenement houses, many of which are more than one hundred years old. From this vantage point you view the new and the old ghettos as one—busy in sight, sound, smell and movement while creating a new type of slum in the great city. Looking into the distance you see, overshadowing everything, the great west wall of our parish—the soaring spires of the financial district. Sprawled, but yet huddled here, is the Lower East Side. Separated by more than space from the monoliths of Wall Street, and contained by the soiled waters of the river, our people have no escape from this life by the three bridges, for these lead only to other crowded areas. But escape there must be; and the bridge to be built is one that will lead to their minds and hearts.

The history of our Lower East Side is that of wave after wave of new people. There have been successive migrations of the Dutch, English, Germans, Irish, Italians, and Jews. And finally there have come the Negroes and Puerto Ricans. Our neighborhood has been called 'the melting pot of America.' But even though it is overcrowded and there are tensions born of this and of poverty, it is a neighborhood. People know that they are 'home' when they emerge from the subways, and many of them love this place where they live. The pushcarts in the streets, the cries of playing children, the greeting of neighbors on the corner, the smell of strange Eastern food—these make 'the East Side.'

It is in this neighborhood that our Mission—which is a part of Trinity Parish—is located. Both our chapels are on Henry Street, and the convent of the Sisters of the Society of St. Margaret, who help us, is on nearby Oliver Street. In addition to a staff of seven priests, we are

blessed with a devoted staff of social workers, secretaries, and vergers. We all try to work together as a team of Christians comprising the inner core of the Mission of our Lord to the Lower East Side. We believe in identifying ourselves as closely as possible with the people among whom we live. We believe in the principle of hospitality and hang on the walls of our rooms the motto of St. Benedict of Nursia: *Let every guest be received as Christ.* We hold, with our Saviour, that His Church is a society of redeemed sinners and that no one, no matter how wicked in the eyes of society, may be barred from entrance to this holy community or denied its help. Our people are poor; most of them are members of minority groups; many of them are new to the Episcopal Church.

In reality, our Mission is very little different from almost any other in our Church except that a certain inner excitement appears to be characteristic of its life—a tension born of its multiracial nature. It is as though we all realize that we are undertaking to lead a kind of life together which is not common to much of the life of the world outside the Church. In addition, the Mission and its people are located in the heart of a rapidly changing and dynamic community. All of the tensions belonging to such a city area are accentuated here. It really costs something to be a true Christian on the Lower East Side—especially if you are young and new in the faith.

If you wish to see our Christian community in action, the best place to do so is at the Sunday Eucharists held in both chapels. There, young and old, brown-skinned and white-skinned, gather for the worship of God at the Table He prepares. They sing hymns together, sometimes in

English and Spanish simultaneously. They enter into the richly corporate life of the Liturgy with an enthusiasm, and frequently with a gusto, that seems strange to our reserved Anglican tradition.

It is our hope that the whole life of our Mission stems from the worship of God at His altar. The feelings of acceptance and belonging, so noticeable in many of our people, come not only from the ordinary friendliness which people may have for each other, but especially from the wonderful action of grace so freely imparted to us all particularly at the Holy Communion.

It is true that much that is done by our youth and adults could take place as easily in a settlement house or community center. There is, however, a certain *plus* about the life of our Mission on Henry Street. It is difficult to put into words the nature of this added factor. Perhaps because the Church—acting unashamedly *as* Church—does all this, our communal life seems to be different. At any rate, a dimension often new, and even unknown to the secular agency, is recognized—man is approached and understood as a total being. He is looked upon as a being rooted in history and yet as one whose destiny lies above and beyond history. He is a person and, therefore, of infinite value. The group, Spirit-filled, never allows him to be annihilated by its own life. On the contrary, his individual life is moved toward completion by its life. He is capable both of giving and receiving love, and when this is impossible, he lives in the real misery of hell.

Following love's way in attempting to reach across the barrier of personal and social sin to the depths of another person is the long, often agonizing, way. But it is only

through love offered again and again that a person becomes alive and in movement towards his destiny. Surely no man can be expected to take his place of responsibility among the brethren if the way of judgment only is used. Nor can he learn of the love of God in his real life situation unless he has experienced, somehow and somewhere, the love of man. And not to know even the love of man is the condition of thousands who pass along our city streets.

To follow the way of love means to leave one's self open to the hostility of the unloved. The parish Christian must be willing to submit even to crucifixion at the hands of the angry. The joy of the Resurrection is known in the moment when the other responds with love to the love that is offered. This event, often repeated, is the history of a parish in the Church of God. The story of every parish should be a love story.

I remember a visit a long time ago of Miss Dorothy Day, of the Catholic Worker Movement, to Grace Church in Jersey City. After she had remained with us awhile and had shared something of the life of our parish there, she said, 'There is so much of the love of God in this place.' Her remark made us feel humble and sad because we knew that within ourselves we did not possess sufficiently of that love. All of us should remember the words of John of the Cross, 'Do not forget that at the end of life you will be judged by how much you have loved.'

This, then, is a love story. It is the tale of a continuing attempt by a small group of Christians to overcome hate and anxiety in the inner heart of a band of boys and girls. The story is not victoriously successful; nor can it ever be in time and space. It is, in part, the story of some

people who did not possess enough of the love of God inside themselves to share a bit of it.

The word 'gang' is a sociological term used to designate a conflict group of boys and girls who engage in certain types of antisocial behavior. When one, therefore, reports that a gang did this or that, he says nothing about the emotions involved and the heartbreak and cruel suffering. He does not mention frustrations which arise from living in cramped tenement houses standing in sub-standard neighborhoods. He says nothing about souls.

Even the word 'parish' may be a sociological term. But a Christian parish consists of a multiplicity of loving human relationships, under God. It is constructed of the manifold communications between real persons in the whole of their life.

A great deal of this story must be written in the first person singular because, in the last analysis, it is the personal relationship, the individual confrontation, that is the deciding element. Therefore I have not tried to keep my personal reactions out of it. Relationship, vertically viewed, is personal, and this can be no less true horizontally. Yet these are not *my* feelings, really. They are those of every parish priest who tries to show God's love to the dispossessed. And all along I have had the feeling that we underestimate the love of these people and fail to understand the depth of their feelings.

This little book cannot contain the whole story of a parish, but it will attempt to tell the story of a small group of young people who, under the Providence of God, came to be involved in our life, as did ours with theirs. Most of it will center in the Knights, one of the

gangs of the Lower East Side. It will not be an easy story to tell. There are so many causes of group and individual delinquency—matters of personal psychology, family, environment, racial pressures—all interwoven in the most complicated fashion. The reasons for triumph over delinquency are equally as complicated. Perhaps the most I can do is to try to paint a few pictures and then add, both as a priest and as a human being, some personal reflections. I have said that it will not be a pretty story. It will be a gloriously triumphant one, however, if I am given grace to tell it aright.

May the love of Christ surround us, and may we continue forever in the communion of all the saints. Amen.

CHAPTER I

The Knights

The decision of the Knights to join our mission youth program was not spontaneous. For weeks before they reached a decision, their leaders had been looking us over—casing the joint, as the boys later admitted. Finally, when they felt assured that we weren't all squares, they made their decision; but the Pres* had to lead the way. This is how it happened.

One cold fall night the Pres, the War Councillor, and a committee of three members came to the Vicarage and asked if they might see me on a 'confidential matter.' When the verger ushered them into my office, I at once

* Various words of gang parlance used in this book have been defined in a glossary on page 155. This glossary was compiled by Marvin Murray, one of the young parishioners of S. Augustine's.—C. K. M.

recognized them as boys who had been attending our Sunday night dances for several months, although I did not know their names.

The Pres introduced the delegation as representing the Knights—a street club of some twenty boys—and at once came to the point of their visit by asking if they might have a club room at the church for their use. Could they also hold public dances, he asked, in order to make money? would the church provide the club with basketball uniforms and a coach? could they use the club room until midnight, except on Friday and Saturday nights when two o'clock would be the desirable time for closing?

Finally, when the requests seemed endless, I called a halt by saying that we were interested in knowing what the club could offer the church. Did they know that this was a church and not a community center? how the church might get the money to provide these goods and services when the parish was not able to support the clubs whose members actually belonged to the church?

I then told them what the church was trying to do for the neighborhood, especially for teenagers. I told them quite frankly that our chief interest was not in them as a club, but that we were interested because of our long-range intention of bringing them individually into the church as active members. I informed them that they would have to share our limited facilities and staff with the hundreds of others who belonged to the youth center of the church.

But it was when I told them that I was the only person available to act as adult advisor for the club that they really were taken aback. It was clear that they needed time to consider this unexpected development very care-

fully. Consequently, it was suggested that we hold another meeting the following week. I agreed on the time and the place—one week hence at the candy store on Lewis Street, which was on their own turf.

During the week which followed, our staff picked up a goodly bit of information about the Knights.

The Knights took their name from a street club uptown. Indeed, they were a 'division' in a syndicate of clubs located in low income areas all over the city. The syndicate had divisions composed of both mixed and single ethnic groups. The downtown Knights were a Negro group.

They had banded together, as we learned from their own testimony, for a number of reasons, the most important being self protection. Most of the boys and the families from which they came had never lived in a multi-racial neighborhood. Now these Negro families were thrown into a life of close-quarter living in the low cost housing projects with whites who did not always welcome with open arms their new darker-skinned neighbors—especially on the teenage level. It was natural, then, for the Negro boys to band together. They felt more at home in each other's company. Their folk-ways and even their own variety of 'bop' language were different from those of the whites. They felt uneasy whenever they found themselves in the presence of the more numerous white youngsters, and they needed their own group to feel secure.

Furthermore, there were many tensions between the Negro and the Puerto Rican youth. One factor in this was the keenly felt one of economic competition. 'They (the Puerto Ricans) think they are superior to us,' was the common judgment of the Negro boys. There also

was resentment at the Puerto Rican's refusal to identify in any way with Negroes, even in the case of dark-skinned members of this national group. Then, of course, the profound differences in culture and language played an important role in sustaining the cleavage.

We learned from a nearby settlement that the club had been thrown out of its program on two occasions for starting fights and breaking furniture. We discovered that a petty 'shake-down' operation at a junior high school had been traced to the Knights. There was no evidence of their using dope, but several members were reported as given to wine drinking bouts on week-ends. It developed that the club was feared by every other gang in its neighborhood with the exception of the Jaguars.

It became increasingly clear that the Knights would be a problem if we were to take them into our parish life. On the positive side, however, the leadership seemed to be fairly stable. Both the Pres and the War Councillor had good school records. Furthermore, four members were communicants of our parish, and the parents of one of these boys were very active in the church program. Incidentally, they were unaware that their son belonged to a gang.

What finally decided the question of admitting them, however, was the offer we received from a well-known group therapist, a friend of ours, to help us with the group on a consulting basis. It later developed that I, as acting supervisor, needed this support more than the club!

On the night appointed I met the club at the candy store on Lewis Street. The officers and about twenty

members were present. After some introductory talk I suggested that we might more comfortably continue our meeting at the parish house, since it was a cool evening. The boys agreed to this and we moved over to the church office.

When the Pres opened the meeting, he outlined once again what the Knights expected us to do for them. I responded by running through some of their past history, both as a street club and as a group in the settlement house. Immediately the room was filled with indignant denials. Everything would have been all right at the settlement, they asserted, if the Director had not been 'so prejudiced.' Furthermore, the 'fays' didn't want them around and hogged all the best gym time.

I asked them to spell out for me their feelings about the settlement house staff. They said that at one point the gym worker called attention to their color by informing them that in the South this behavior of theirs would end in a lynching. His very first words with them had been prefaced by the ill-timed remark that 'some of his best friends were Negroes.' I asked them whether they thought priests were prejudiced. One of them said that this was impossible because priests were 'disciples.'

At this point we got down to cases with respect to their using the church as a base. It was clear that they considered the church a part of their 'turf.' I explained to them that the church was for everybody who wished to use it and that it was neutral territory. They were surprised when I described to them our pact with the Three Crowns and the Tribesmen, who had agreed to respect the church and its neighborhood and never to 'bop' when present. I went on to say that this no-rumbling agreement had stood up for two years. I also informed

them of the understanding we had with all groups never to come 'packing.' We felt obliged, I explained, to confiscate all pieces and to inform the police whenever a fellow refused to turn over his knife or piece. We went into the no-drinking rules but skirted the narcotics problem, because I felt certain that none of the Knights were on the stuff.

After a long and turbulent meeting, it finally was decided that the Knights would have a weekly meeting in my office and that following the meeting there would be a gym and recreation period in the chapel hall. In this way we began our relationship with the club. The long, patient struggle for the souls of these lads began that night. They were unaware of our love for their souls—such an experience was quite foreign to them. Most of them knew nothing of the love of God because they felt unloved and unwanted by man.

From the moment the Knights were accepted in the parish as a group, their lives and ours became intertwined. If we will but see it, such a meeting between persons is always an event of the first magnitude, for changes take place in the life and destiny of all those involved: Inner judgments are made; responsibilities are accepted or rejected. Sometimes these meetings with which we are blessed are meetings full of wonder and beauty—but at other times they may be shot through with tragedy and grief.

Many disturbing questions confronted us as we watched our bond with the Knights develop. We wondered if we possessed within ourselves enough of God's love to be able to give as strenuously as we knew we should have to. We tried to determine the extent of their experience of love; their experience of hate we had

no need to explore—it was obvious. But what lurked behind that hate and negativism we did not know; to learn that answer was the heart of the challenge we faced.

Any group is made up of the individuals who are its members. What they are they bring to the group for good or for ill. But once they are in, they become caught up into its corporate history. Although at the outset a member may change the group by what he is, or stands for, it is the group that later initiates the changes in its members. Sometimes a person will seem to lead a dual life—an individual, and a group, life. Certainly, for him there seem to exist two codes of conduct: what he does alone, he will not do as a member of his group. Because gang membership affects individuals this way, we are often reminded of the phrase 'moral man and immoral society.' I once knew a lad who was an altar boy Sunday morning and a war councillor Sunday night. Perhaps the fact that he was an altar boy was the reason he habitually counselled his gang to act moderately and to avoid bopping.

A boy joins a gang for a number of important reasons. First of all, he joins because he has the need to join. For unless there are accepting institutions in his community that provide him opportunities to mingle with his peers, he will very likely have the need to join a gang. Second, he may join because he has to, for gangs frequently undertake high pressure recruiting campaigns, and it is difficult for a lone youngster to resist such pressure from his peers. Usually it is not safe to resist. Third, he may join because a friend belongs, or because he is stuck on a girl who is a Deb. Or he may join for the 'kicks,' gang life holding a fascination for him. Sometimes he joins

because he aspires to be a great leader or to copy someone he has seen in movies and TV plays. Lastly—and this a tragic reason—he may be afraid to stand alone and joins because he needs protection from the group that controls the block a few streets away.

We have seen meek little lambs turn, on joining a gang, into ferocious lions. Some 'good' boys after entrance have fallen apart morally. On the other hand, we have seen boys join a gang, stay with it for a while, then quit it, apparently untouched by the experience. In any event, most boys outgrow the gang when they reach eighteen. Boys returning home after a hitch in the armed forces often are amused at the be-bops, forgetting their own days on the street.

The individual Knights joined up for any one, or all of these reasons. The primary motive, undoubtedly, was that they were boys, as well as friends, who wanted to do things together. Unfortunately there was not much to do together except acquire a 'rep.' As a group they wanted 'a place of their own,' to belong to some larger group. And so they drifted from the corner to the candy store to the youth center—feeling all the while the breath of the cops on their necks. At length when they came to the Mission and were not repulsed, they wondered what the gimmick was and began to test us over a long period.

This test period is trying for anyone liking peace and quiet, little of which we were to enjoy at the Mission for a long time to come. The arrival of the Knights also meant that their satellites and friends soon began to drift into the chapels. When you take in a street club, a gang if you will, you have to be prepared to take in their

cousins and brothers and sisters and friends from all five boroughs!

The Knights' favorite pastime was to see how far they could go with the staff. They would tease and annoy. They would push to the point of destroying property and then wait to see what the reaction would be. We on our side had to be careful not to get angry; yet we had to be firm. We had to use every available means to worm our way into their lives. All this was asking for work in that every last one of the Knights was having personal or family trouble. A good third of them were on probation and the club needed a wide range of casework services.

It takes more than love and skill to work with a street club—it also takes money. We never kept an accurate record of the cost to us and to the social service agencies working with the Knights; but we knew that, although it was a big sum, it did not approach the figure which might be spent by the state had our agencies not been on the job. The Knights were, potentially, a highly dangerous group to the community, as well as to themselves.

CHAPTER II

Family Portrait

ONE SUNDAY AFTERNOON

We had just finished dinner in the Vicarage one Sunday afternoon, and the clergy had gone. Only a few parishioners remained to talk awhile. Suddenly we heard shouting in the street; the voices were angry. Rushing to the window, we looked out upon a large group of the Knights standing in front of the Settlement. When they saw us, they pointed down the street.

Up the middle of Henry Street, up the bloody block as some have named it, came the two Johnson brothers. They walked slowly, their hands in their pockets. They looked grim.

I gestured inquiringly with my hands and shoulders at the Knights. One of them shouted, 'Razors!'

I tore down into the street and walked toward the approaching brothers feeling half foolish, as though I were part of a Western drama played in the main street of a cattle town. But it was serious and I was not sure how to cope with it. I knew only that I must somehow get the razors away from them.

Willie Johnson I knew well. We had been through things together. But Ben always had been sullen and uncommunicative; we never had gotten through to him. He hardly could be called a Knight at all. I did know that whenever he got into trouble, Willie would stand by him right or wrong. At club meetings both brothers often were the objects of sounding. Frequently, they were ridiculed for their very dark complexion. The club knew that the boys' mother played the numbers and they made hay with that bit of knowledge. The result was that the brothers were filled with hostility toward almost everyone. I knew that Ben hated me, not because I had ever done anything to him, but simply because I was another white in a position of authority.

My pitch must be to Willie. Approaching him, I said, as evenly as I could, 'Willie, will you give me the razor?'

He did not answer but looked at me with anger written all over his dark face.

'Willie,' I repeated, 'Will you please give me the razor before you hurt someone?'

Again there was no answer, only an angry look.

'Willie,' I said, 'I think I understand what is happening and I want you to know that I do. Maybe if you'll tell me what's wrong, I can help.'

He answered savagely, 'You'll never understand us. Your kind will never understand us.'

I was not at all sure what he meant. Was it that I

could not understand as a priest or as a white man? Was it that I could not understand the present situation, or the larger problems, of the Johnson brothers? Perhaps all this was implicit in his words.

I used every argument I could think of to get the razors. I warned them of the punishment that certainly would follow a cutting. I reminded them that they both had records and that this time they would be sent away for a long time. Were they to kill one of the Knights, they too might pay with their lives. I knew I was not reaching either one of them, although at times Willie seemed to waver. I sensed that he really wanted me to help him out of the fix they were in.

Finally I said to him, 'Willie, what do you call me?'

After a moment of hesitation, he answered, 'Father.'

'Willie, what do the other Knights call me?'

A longer silence and then, 'Father.'

This time I waited; it was my last pitch.

'Willie, if you call me Father, what does that mean that you are to me?'

He looked as though he wanted to cry, 'I, I am . . . your son.'

'And they?'

'Sons.'

We looked at each other, long. His was a soft look, that of a child. Slowly he reached into his pocket. He pulled out the razor and handed it to me. Then he turned and, with Ben, walked away down the street.

Willie, I know that I never fully will understand you. I cannot penetrate the pain so often on your face . . . Once you said to me that you never walk

down Henry Street without feeling that the white people passing by are looking upon you with distrust and pity . . . Sure, I know why you and Bob and Chris and the others banded together; you almost had to form a club. But way inside I know that I cannot understand . . . Another time I sent you for a job which had been arranged on the telephone. You returned later to say that you were the first to arrive but that the man had hired the boy next in line, a white boy. I tried to explain that perhaps the second boy had the right qualifications and that you may have not. You said that no questions had been asked of either of you by the boss . . . Do you remember how I stammered and then dropped my gaze from you? Do you remember, Willie, the long silence, my attempt to tell you how I felt? And you did not understand me!

Sometimes it seems to us in our work at the Mission that every step forward is followed by two steps backward. I remember going once to a dinner at which a number of group-workers were present and my mentioning to them this feeling of discouragement about our work with the Knights. One of them remarked, 'Well, at least you keep them together, and there is communication. That, you know, is almost too much to expect.' I felt greatly encouraged. Today looking back at the period when we were working with the Knights as an active club, I feel that, in the main, we did the right things for them and with them. However, when we consider the large number of them, and the high proportion who were not helped, but have slipped away

either into institutions or further personal disintegration—when we consider all this, our hearts are not sanguine over the results.

BEN AND WILLIE

Let us take, for example, Ben Johnson, one of the original Knights, and try to understand why he is the person that he is today at seventeen. Two years ago he was committed indeterminately to the Elmira Reception Center for having robbed a neighborhood grocery store. Ben had had a long record of trouble with the police, three arrests prior to this last robbery. What are some of the reasons for his downfall?

Number one, his family background could account for much. The suspicion that he was illegitimate was always burning in Ben's mind. He could not face this possibility. During the time I knew Ben, Fanny, his mother, lived with a certain Joe. He was not Fanny's husband, although he was the father of several of the younger children. Fanny would disappear for long periods of time and no one knew her whereabouts. When this happened Joe would take care of his own kids, but left Ben and Willie to shift for themselves. In his anger he would not so much as provide food for these half-starved boys. This common suffering was a strong bond between these youngsters. Later on, I learned that it was during one of Fanny's absences that Ben and Willie broke into a grocery store—they had to eat. Their apartment was on the top floor of an old-law tenement house, and I never saw it when it wasn't incredibly filthy. A mute reminder of this squalor shows permanently on Ben's face—a scar that marks where a rat chewed him when he was a baby.

Ben really loved Fanny, although her feelings toward him alternated from anger to love. One moment she would curse him, the next she would embrace and coddle him. It was clear that Fanny felt guilty about her treatment of her sons, but—weighed down with her own miseries—she could never do anything about it. Ben would become violently angry with his mother, especially during the periods of famine in the house caused by her gambling. However, so far as I know, he never struck her on such occasions. His younger sister had fallen into promiscuous ways in her early teens, and Ben had committed incest with her a number of times. Family background!

Number two, racial feelings. Both Ben and Willie hated themselves for being Negro, although they never would admit to this.

I recall a young people's discussion group which we conducted in a violently non-directive way. The kids would gather together once a week and after one of us had appointed a chairman for the meeting, we would leave them to their own devices. After three or four chairmen had been elected and then impeached, the youngsters would begin their discussion. It would be no exaggeration to say that they were turbulent and noisy; one could hardly hear the speaker. Frequently the meeting would end with several small groups discussing some topic of their own, each ignoring the other, while on a number of occasions the meetings broke up with everyone rushing through the door into the street.

Ben, however, usually succeeded in getting the attention of the entire group because of his loud voice, but more especially because race was his favorite topic. It didn't matter much what the group was talking about,

Ben always succeeded in turning the talk into something having to do with race and with their feelings towards whites. He was filled to the brim with hatred toward the majority group. He felt that all white people thoroughly despised him and was, in fact, himself prejudiced against people of lighter skin than himself. He always went out of his way to insult the brown-skinned members of the group, implying that their color was due to some previous alliance with whites. All the while, of course, he secretly envied their lightness. He blamed his plight upon the fact that he was a Negro and that a Negro never could get anywhere in this country. If he left school, it was because of the prejudice of white teachers towards him. When he was turned down for a job, the reason was that he was a Negro. Sometimes his hatred moved in crescendo fashion from bitterness to more bitterness. I noticed that some of the members of the group were shocked at his attitude; and if they attempted to modify his attitude, he would scream at them that they were betrayers of the race.

At one point Ben became involved with the Lower East Side branch of an extreme nationalist group calling itself The Mau-Mau. Word that this group had threatened to burn down Saint Augustine's Chapel came to me from a statement Ben made at discussion group one night. Later they planned to paint the face of the Lady statue black. Some of the Knights got wind of this, and one night after Evening Prayer, they fought it out with some Mau-Mau in front of the church.

One salutary effect of the discussion group on Ben was that it provided him with a safety valve: at meetings he could blow off all the steam he wanted to. One night

during a particularly violent speech against the white race he seemed to run out of arguments. The group sensed this and tried to goad him into making further statements, but he couldn't think of anything else to say. He had to sit down, muttering. It was then that we all felt that earlier something might have been done for Ben but that now it was perhaps too late.

The third reason for his downfall was his personal life. Ben's social activities were usually circumscribed by the fact that he had only a pair of dirty slacks and a jacket. Once in a great while he would blossom out with new clothes—an event that usually gave us some uneasiness in that we suspected the means by which he got them. But usually the boy had no money—not even the dime or quarter admission to church dances. Consequently he would hang around the outer door.

?
Wrong

His friends were, in the main, a few drifters like himself without clothes or money. Although Ben always attended at least part of the meeting of the Knights on Monday evenings, he was never fully accepted by the group and he sensed their hostility toward him. Ben was frequently rude, and he often attempted to get what he wanted by threatening. This, of course, did not help to improve his relations with our staff members.

When the weather was warm, Ben spent a good deal of time sitting on the front steps of the Vicarage. Many times as I watched him sit there, staring into space, I wondered what he was thinking about.

A dangerous proportion of the time he spent alone, we later discovered, was given over to sexual fantasy. Once during a discussion on sex he admitted to some brother Knights that he frequently thought of a white

girl when he masturbated. He quickly added, however, that the only way he would have sex with a white woman would be with an ice pick. Here again race was an obsession with him.

We tried to get him to see a psychiatrist, but he refused since he had closed the doors of his heart and mind to all outsiders and lived, in reality, a lonely, sad life. One time while on a picnic in the country with the Knights he wandered off by himself; and when he did not return, I went in search of him. I found him sitting beneath a tree, his head in his hands, weeping. I asked if I might be of help. His reaction was savage and he told me 'to get the hell' away from him.

We were reasonably certain that when some small articles disappeared from the Vicarage that it was Ben who had taken them, but we could not prove it. After thefts of this kind, he would stay away from the Vicarage and the church for a week or two. Either he could not face us, or he was afraid that we might question him concerning the robbery. We heard from people who saw him in Delancey Street bars that he had been quite drunk. Frequently he went to private house parties in an inebriated condition, and almost always provoked a fight. We all agreed that we never had seen a youngster so full of hostility and anger. When the chips were down he trusted no one, not even Willie. He was absolutely alone save for a tenuous tie with his mother.

We could not get through to Ben. The truth is that there was not enough of God's love in us for us to share with him. Ben is a lost sheep, straying way out beyond the dark hills. But God loves this lost sheep, and it was for such as him that He sent His Son to die.

How to show the Knights that they have a Saviour?

FANNY

She came into the Vicarage late one afternoon. It had stopped snowing and already the streets were filled with dirty slush. She wore only house slippers, a black dress and a mouse-colored coat we had given her the year before. She was a small, brown-skinned lady.

‘What do you mean by accusing me of playing the numbers?’ she asked without any introduction. I asked her to sit down and gave her a cigarette.

Then, the cigarette hanging loose in her fingers, she began to weep. I waited.

Her voice was low, without spirit or body. It was as though I were not present in the room as she spoke, looking down at the rug. ‘It was rough. God, it was rough. You’re white and you don’t understand. Nobody understands, not even God. I loved it down there. It was my home and there were trees and flowers. Every Sunday I sang in the choir and people respected me; I was Lola’s daughter.

‘You won’t believe it but I was pretty then. That was the trouble. They got me in the alley back of the drug store—four of them. They liked to rip me to pieces. I bled all the way home. And when I got there mama wouldn’t believe me. She wouldn’t believe that the drug-gist set them boys on me and then stood there and laughed. When I got home, I threw up all over mama’s bed. Guess that’s what made her mad. She beat on me and screamed at me and I ran out the back door. I kept on going. . . . I’d made trouble for all of them, mama said.’

She was silent awhile. She pulled the old coat around her body as though to hide it from me. This was Fanny

Johnson, Ben and Willie's mother. This was the story of their anger.

She went on. 'I had the baby up North here. It was born dead—and good it was. What chance would it have—half white and half colored? And a bastard to boot. What chance?

'I worked in people's houses after the baby came. I worked from morning to night for white folks. You can't get away from white folks. Then I met Doug. I thought he loved me. I loved him all right, with his big smile. He left me pregnant again, twins. I never did see him again, not to this day. Ben and Willie, they think their real father's dead.'

She rose to her feet, her eyes blazing. 'And don't you tell them! Don't you tell them,' she screamed.

She sat down and began to weep once more.

'I went from one man to the other. Truth is I don't know myself who's father to the rest of the kids. It ain't Joe. He's been good to me. Funny thing, the only man decent to you in your whole life has to be a wino.

'But I wanted everything—especially for the kids. I got to thinking of all the things I never had, and I wanted them to have something good. That's why I play the numbers; it's a chance—something might come up. That's the truth, Father. I want 'em to have something good.'

She was silent now and I spoke of the love of God to her. And the words stuck to the roof of my mouth. . . .

Three months later Fanny Johnson lay dying in Bellevue Hospital. I looked down at her as she slept her life away. They had shaved her head for the fruitless operation, but a kind nurse had swathed it in a kerchief. She

looked young and peaceful, her breathing hardly perceptible.

She's returned, I thought. She's returned to the South and to her youth. She's singing in the choir and she's a virgin. Or maybe Doug is with her. Or maybe the children up North have something good and she's content.

It's hard to understand, as Fanny herself said. But it all is understood in the Heart of our Lord. And I think Blessed Mary has taken Fanny Johnson to her bosom. That is what I thought, when coming down the aisle in Saint Augustine's in front of her body, we sang, 'May the angels receive thee into the heavenly city Jerusalem. And may Lazarus, once a poor man . . .'

Ben was permitted to return from Elmira for the funeral. Manacled to a detective, he did not weep once during the service; but on his face was a lost, desperate look.

POSTSCRIPT ON WILLIE

He had gone to Washington to live with his uncle. With his mother gone there was no place else to go. All the time he was there, he felt that his uncle did not want him. One night, desperate for money to go to a dance, he robbed a store and was caught by the police. The judge placed him on probation. Meanwhile, conditions at home worsened. He finally took the train back to New York.

We helped him to find a room and get a job. After a week he lost the job and had no money for his rent. He returned to us and once again we helped. He lasted in

the new job exactly three days when he was fired for arguing with the boss. This time he did not return but, after living in a flop house a night or two, attempted to burglarize a grocery store. He wrote me from the Tombs.

I went to visit him. In the room where I sat waiting for him to be brought down were several small windows through which visitors looked at the prisoners. Conversation was carried on through inner-connecting telephones placed on either side of the windows.

He started with eagerness as he saw me approach the window. His face lit up. We both grasped our phones.

'How are you, Willie?' I asked.

'O. K., Father.'

'What happened?'

'I lost my job and the rent money was due. You know, the old story with me. I got caught robbing.'

'What will happen to you?'

'The probation officer says I'll get two years. Can you come to court?'

'I'll stand with you, kid. Will you write to me when you are gone? I'll answer every letter.'

'Sure. Thanks for coming to see me.'

'God bless you, Willie. Don't forget me.'

'Don't forget *me*. Goodbye, Father Myers.'

I made the sign of the cross, and they took him away.

CHAPTER III

The Knights in Session

The Knights met weekly at the Vicarage for a period of discussion and conversation. This had an obvious therapeutic value in that it gave them a chance to get things off their chests. Then they would adjourn to the parish hall, which was available to them for recreation; and this double activity of physical and emotional exercise nearly always lowered the pressure in the boiler.

One of the important problems each week was to select a topic for discussion. Our therapist advised us to listen carefully during the days before the meeting to see if we could discover what was on the boys' minds. If we could discover this—and we usually were successful—the start of the meeting was structured. As the first of the boys drifted into the Vicarage, I could casually broach the

topic selected and get a discussion going in a tentative sort of way. Then, as others arrived, they usually chimed in until we finally had a full scale debate under way. Our meetings, set for eight o'clock, seldom began before nine.

One week the obvious topic was the pregnancy of three girls whom some of the club members knew quite well. The therapist and I had thought out very carefully how best to approach this subject. It was finally decided to start the discussion by raising the question, 'Don't you think that a boy should have at least enough responsibility toward a girl to use a contraceptive when engaging in a sexual act?' We agreed that unless the subject were begun at about this level, it was doubtful that we should have a very constructive time. Here, again, we must take the boys where they are and not try to project upon their thinking ideas and standards, strange and incomprehensible to them.

When the question was raised that night, the response was varied. Some declared that they had never used contraceptives, that they did not know how to use them, and that they didn't believe in the use of them. In the course of the discussion, I was appalled again and again by the ignorance of these boys, sixteen and seventeen years old, about the elementary facts of physical behavior. When I raised the question of the responsibility of both boy and girl in the sex act, it was agreed by most of the club that conception could not occur unless both parties experienced a climax simultaneously! Each opinion revealed a mine of misinformation.

From the question of boy-girl responsibility in the eventuality of conception, we moved next to the meaning of love between boy and girl. Most agreed that if

a girl were 'easy,' it would be impossible to have much love for her. As one of them put it, 'If she lets you have it, how do you know that she won't be that way for everybody else?' It was generally conceded that such a girl would not be a desirable life-long mate. This attitude extended also to grinding. One boy said that, 'When a girl is willing to grind, that is enough to tell me that I don't want to go steady with her.' When I remarked that this smacked of a double standard, there was heated discussion, the club feeling that the sexual behavior of boys was something quite different from that of girls.

[They seemed to think that, along sexual lines, boys were allowed to do anything they pleased. In fact, if a boy had not had sexual intercourse, he certainly must be a faggot. Furthermore, if a boy did not have the reputation of having had sexual intercourse one or more times, it was highly unlikely that a decent girl would be interested in him. I never could find out whether this was a fact or a rationalization.)

When I raised the question of retaining one's chastity until marriage, stating that this is the Church's position, they unanimously rejected it, declaring it to be an impossible standard for young people on the Lower East Side. Still, it was agreed, this did not make it right—just impossible. What if, I queried, a whole club were to take a strong stand on this matter of having sex? They agreed that it would be far easier for a club to take such a stand than for an individual. They added, however, that even this would not be possible unless the Debs were to agree to a similar stand. (It might be remarked at this point that during a similar discussion of this question with the Knights' Debs, the girls' group worker discovered that it was their opinion that they perhaps should

call a halt to promiscuous sexual activity. They preferred, they said, to have companions among the boys rather than mere sexual partners. However, they alleged that it would be difficult to keep 'in with the crowd' unless one gave in once in awhile.)

It can be seen that there was a very wide chasm between the sexual practice of the Knights and the Church's teaching on this subject. I knew full well, as did my colleagues, that to begin a discussion with them on the basis of Christian ethics would have cut off any fruitful exchange of views. The boys might have listened politely. But the discussion would probably have been so far removed from their life situation that it would have meant relatively little to them. We had to be content with a more oblique approach.

After several general discussions on sex, the clergy were approached by individuals within the club seeking out more information and giving expression to their own feelings. It developed that several of them wished to change the pattern of their sexual behavior but did not know how to resist the dominant pattern among their peers. Significantly, the sex practices of their parents were highly disturbing to some. It was made clear to us again and again that it is really difficult to be a Christian on the Lower East Side—especially if one is young.

These discussions, and similar ones conducted by the Knights, were conducted in a radically permissive fashion. I interrupted only when exchanges became too violent or when the club asked me—as it did frequently—for my opinion about this or that. Much time was given over to sounding. For example, when the club discussed the pregnancies mentioned above, the mem-

bers spent a good deal of time accusing each other of responsibility for them. Sometimes a member would bluntly call another some derogatory name. Since this could easily precipitate physical fighting, I had to be alert to check developments at this point—sometimes only by shouting louder than anyone else in the group. Fortunately, I never had too much trouble in restoring order.

At almost every meeting hostilities were acted out, sometimes in most dramatic manner. For example, the Pres frequently would pace up and down the length of the office, shaking his fists at various members of the club. They in turn would manifest their anger toward him, either by walking out of the room only to return shortly or by striking at someone else. The Pres, being strong and powerful, was never directly threatened by anyone.

Ordinarily after an hour and a half of discussion, most of it violent, the club was sufficiently rid of its hostilities to be able to go to the parish hall for recreation. Here, unless anger had not been completely drained off, games such as pool, shuffle-board, and checkers were popular. We tried to interest some of the boys in 'progressive jazz.' Later two or three developed an interest in classical music as a result of this earlier experience. The rough time on club night came just before break-up when everyone would have to leave. That critical period extended through the time the club was assembled in the street in front of the church until the members went their several ways. We never felt quite secure until we saw the break-up and the last of them leave in some semblance of order.

Almost every week one club member at least would

remain after the meeting to talk over some matter of importance to him—his visit with his probation officer or his next appearance in court. Later on there took place a great many important discussions between the boys and the members of our staff. On these occasions we found we were really able to reach them. Our custom was to take them upstairs in the Vicarage and sit with them around the dining room table. At one time quite a sizable group of the Knights came upstairs each Monday night to talk about race problems. Once in awhile I would ask a friend who knew something about race relations in the city to drop in casually and take part in the discussion. We learned that the boys loved meeting strangers who had knowledge that was of interest to them. Although they were shy about meeting them, they soon got used to them and would freely discuss matters of concern in their presence. As the weeks and months went on in this fashion, it became clear that no matter what subject was chosen for discussion, we always ended up with a further discussion of the race question. Obviously, it was on everybody's mind, and there were many avenues to be explored.

After they had been with us a year, the Knights asked permission to have their women join them for the recreational period. The request was granted. There was much horse play, and the degree of roughness with which a Knight handled his 'old lady' measured almost exactly the degree of his affection for her. There was some desultory dancing and, at times, a lot of sounding between the sexes.

One night we organized a panel of the Knights to discuss in the Debs' presence the topic 'What is the matter with girls?' This was to be followed the next week with a

discussion by a similar panel of Debs. I recall with particular horror that first discussion. The sounding was vicious, and the climax came when Adele slapped the Pres in the face. He raised his great hand to strike her back when I shouted with all my lung power, 'Stop.' I then reamed them all out and adjourned the meeting. The Debs stalked out angrily. The Knights hung around awhile and then left to make peace on an individual basis with the girls. We never had the second panel discussion.

The next week I raised the question, 'Why no dating?' It was the Knights' practice to meet their 'old ladies' *inside* for a dance. This was the time-honored custom and very likely arose out of the boys' financial straits. No Knight *ever* treated a girl to a soda in the candy store on Columbia Street. In fact, there was a studied avoidance even of the minimal social gestures with members of the other sex. A Knight would pull a girl from her chair in lieu of asking her to dance. He would leave her in the middle of the floor when the music stopped. He never sat with his girl at a social function. He remained with the boys in a corner far removed from the Debs.

And so, we came to the question, 'Why no dating?' There was confusion at the start because most of the members had no real idea what a date was. I described my own youthful experience at dating. My account of treating a girl to one soda and two straws, one of them for me, brought the house down. 'But why,' they said, 'take a girl out alone anyhow?' They knew only one reason for doing that—to have sex with her. When we got into the subject, the predatory habits of the Knights were revealed: A fellow sees a pretty girl and is attracted to her. From then on he has one object in view—the sex act. He uses all his powers of persuasion to get her

to give in to him. The final scene in this pitiful drama is enacted behind the stairs, or on the roof, or in the bushes in the park, or in an apartment when the adults are away. The girl becomes the boy's steady, but usually for a few weeks only. Then the drama is re-enacted with other actors and scenery.

'What about companionship,' I asked. 'What about getting to know a girl as a friend, as someone a fellow can go places with, see things with?' Alas, for these youngsters this was an unexplored world. Our staff undertook to change this by developing new types of program to encourage healthy boy-girl relationships. It is unnecessary to add that this was a most difficult undertaking for us.

Joe, one of the Knights, told me that, as a child, he had watched the sex acts of his parents that produced his younger brothers and sisters. For a youngster, cooped-up in a three-room cold water flat with his large family, this is not an unusual experience. And he had seen plenty, years before, when his oldest brother brought home his young bride the day they were married. . . .

Tom told me about the fights his parents had night after night. When it got too rough, he climbed through his bedroom window and left by the fire escape. The street was a welcome haven. . . .

The Johnson boys never had seen their father—only a succession of men who resented them and whom they tormented. . . .

Adele, one of the Debs, was illegitimate and knew it. She had been made pregnant by a no-good guy, but the baby had died before birth. . . .

Sue had been raped by her uncle. . . .

Dates? A boy and a girl walking through the park, swinging hands? The Junior Prom with Mary in a sweet new gown? Mother glad to have the gang in during the evening? The beat cop yelling, 'Hi ya, kids!' at the group on the stoop? The teacher inviting you and your girl up for supper? I remember those things, those mighty events in a young life.

But not the Knights. Not the Debs.

CHAPTER IV

A Riot Makes Them Friends

The Knights and their friends had been with us for about four months when something happened that brought us together 'tight,' as the boys say. What happened was frightening. We saw it developing but felt helpless in face of it.

The block in which the Mission stands was considered the turf of a sizable group of Irish and Italian boys called the Robins. They were the sons of old residents in the neighborhood. But now for the first time an ever growing number of Negro youth began coming into the block to the church. At first the Robins seemed to take little notice of this development. Then one day the Knights and another club known as the Counts played a game of stick ball in the street in front of the church—the tra-

ditional playing area of the Robins. Nothing happened at the time but, as the Knights told us, the Robins began to 'look hard' at them. Our staff discussed the problem with the settlement people across the way, but we were stumped for a solution. The Robins were house members at the settlement, although not in very good standing. They were a problem to the settlement in that, among other things, their prejudices prevented the agency from integrating its teenage clientele. The most we could do, it seemed, was to keep a close watch on all developments and to keep the two groups out of each other's way.

I was on vacation in May of that year when a phone call from the Mission brought me back to New York in a hurry. Street fighting had broken out between a large group of our own Negro boys and an equally large group of these white youngsters. It was 'on' between the Knights and the Robins.

I arrived on the Lower East Side late at night. And though the weather was warm, there was hardly anyone on the street. It seemed as though a plague had struck Henry Street and that everyone had in fear taken cover. I noticed two cops standing on each corner as I drove by.

In the vicarage parlor staff members from the church and the settlement together with a number of the Knights had gathered. As quickly as possible, they briefed me on the situation.

Apparently a few nights before, an incident then judged minor, had taken place. While sitting on the front steps of the Vicarage, one of the Knights had been called a 'nigger' by a small white boy passing by. By way of retaliation, the Knight had slapped him in the face. It developed later that this little kid was the cousin of a leading Robin. Two nights later the Robins appeared

in front of the Vicarage, demanding vengeance—that the Knight present himself for punishment. All of the Knights rushed into the street. The social worker with the Knights attempted to reason with the Robins but to no avail. A first-class street fight began, involving almost a hundred boys. Staff workers poured out of the settlement and the church to stop the fight, but in the melee a young soldier, whose brother was a Robin, was stabbed in the hip by someone. Finally, the police arrived and the boys scattered. The social workers and clergy informed the police what had happened.

The fight threw the whole neighborhood into a state of fear and anger. Rumors of shootings and stabbings spread through the streets. The really frightening aspect of the situation, I was told, was that adults were getting involved. The police attitude was to let the boys fight and then arrest them all. The Precinct Captain had stated that the only solution was to 'lock up' everybody involved.

It was my responsibility, as Vicar, to make some immediate decisions, and this was the reason why I had to return home. My first move was to call a City Councilman whom I knew to acquaint him with the gravity of the situation. He promised to telephone the Police Commissioner early the next morning. Next we turned to the immediate problem of getting the Knights home safely. A staff member brought over the mission station wagon for this purpose. But Willie Johnson refused to leave the Vicarage. He was thoroughly frightened, and even though I offered to walk him to his door, he still wanted to stay. I began to feel in my spirit something of the utter horror of a race riot.

I told Willie that he could sleep on the couch in the

front room and gave him a blanket. Turning out the lights, I retired to the rear of the Vicarage and went to bed. It seemed only a moment later that I heard Willie scream. I tore through the hall into the parlor. Switching on the lights, I found Willie standing in the middle of the room looking toward the sideboard in the dining room.

‘What is it, Willie?’ I asked.

‘There is something there. It made a noise,’ he said. I searched the room but found nothing. Then, his panic visibly increasing, Willie moved toward the door leading to the stairway.

‘I’m going out,’ he said.

‘But you can’t. You’ve got on only your shirt.’

‘I don’t care what I got on,’ he cried, ‘I’m scared. I don’t know what to do.’ And as he looked at me, shaking, two great tears flowed slowly down his cheeks.

‘Willie, my son, come and sleep with me,’ I said finally. Slowly he turned away from the door and followed me to the bedroom. After a bit he fell asleep. I couldn’t sleep. It seemed as though a whole new set of fears appeared. I never saw them in myself before.

The next morning I learned more of the depth of Willie’s terror. Earlier the night before, when the group at the Vicarage was discussing the situation, Willie had suddenly begun to speak. He talked in a monotone, looking down at the floor, addressing no one in particular. He spoke so quietly sometimes that they had to strain their ears to hear what he was saying.

‘I’ve never been so scared,’ he said. ‘I never thought I’d live to see this happen. There were bunches of them all over the street and they were hiding in the doorways. They wanted to get me. They wanted to kill me. I can’t

hide anywhere. There is no place to go. You know what? Every morning I get up out of the bed and look in the mirror and what do I see—a black face. Where can I put my face! *Where can I put my face?*

And then, Father Love told me, Willie's voice trailed off into silence and he began to weep hysterically, his thin body heaving. They all had sat there watching him, each with his own thoughts.

Willie was now a wheel in the Knights. He and I were friends, and there was something between us that neither he nor I could define. No, I do have an idea—somehow on a deep level we two became involved with our dear Lord, although His Name was never spoken.

Early that morning the Knights were all over the place. They felt at home and talked openly and earnestly with us. Tom, the Pres, sat down and man to man gave his opinion. And there was trust in his voice. I told him that the staff had offered Mass for the Robins and the Knights that morning and that Willie was there. 'What did you want to offer it for *them* for?' he protested. Then there ensued one of the most confused theological discussions I have ever known. 'Listen, you guys,' I finally shouted, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ took the rap for all of us. This morning we offered thanks to God for what He did when they nailed Him to the cross. Understand?'

Well, they didn't. They didn't dig why Christ felt He had to take the rap for them or for anybody else.

We scheduled a conference that morning with the settlement house people. The Police Commissioner was sending a deputy and my friend, the Councilman, was also planning to be present. I called the Diocesan Office and asked Father Bell to attend. While we were waiting, we heard shouts in the street. Rushing to the front door,

we saw collected a crowd of at least one hundred and fifty white women, dressed in dungarees. They were demanding that we force the Negro girls in the Vicarage to come into the street so that they 'could teach them a lesson.' Well, there were no girls in the Vicarage—saving our housekeeper, God bless her, who stayed in hiding in a clothes closet for most of that week.

It was impossible to quiet these women, although seeing our staff of priests in cassocks had some effect. Finally, a policeman arrived. He looked desperate and, critical though the situation was, we could not help being amused when he threw up his hands and said, 'What do any of you expect me to do with a bunch of crazy women?' After a while, however, the women dispersed.

We learned later their reason for gathering. Apparently on the day before the word 'nigger' had been written on the blackboards of the Junior High School. In response, some Negro girls had threatened 'to get' some white girls the next day at school. The mothers, mostly from the housing project, had assembled in battle array to defend their daughters. Someone had told them that we were 'protecting' the Negro girls in the Vicarage.

Later that morning we held our conference. We began by recounting the full story to the Police Deputy and the Councilman. They agreed that the situation was indeed critical. The Deputy promised to send down a number of his Youth Squad men. He also assured us that the area would be completely covered by uniformed police and squad cars. We in turn agreed to pass along all information that might come our way to the Precinct Station. In other words, the police were to prevent any mass disorder, and we were to have the job of restoring peace in the neighborhood. But how?

Our first step was to persuade the Knights to meet with the Robins. They agreed to this, providing the meeting could take place at some neutral place. The next step was to reach the Robins through the settlement. This was done and the meeting was called for that night.

The meeting followed the usual pattern: heated accusations and counter-accusations. At least an hour was spent in letting them all verbalize their hostilities. Finally it was agreed that a cooling off period of one week was in order. We left the room.

Henry Street was filled with people waiting for news of the meeting. As we entered the street, Mrs. MacTavish met us screaming at the top of her lungs that her son, Terry, a Robin, had been arrested for assaulting a Negro boy. It wasn't fair, she declared to the crowd, in view of all that 'the colored' had done to the decent, law-abiding boys who had lived all their lives in the neighborhood. The Robins began to draw together tight, and the Knights slipped away into the Vicarage. It was 'on' again.

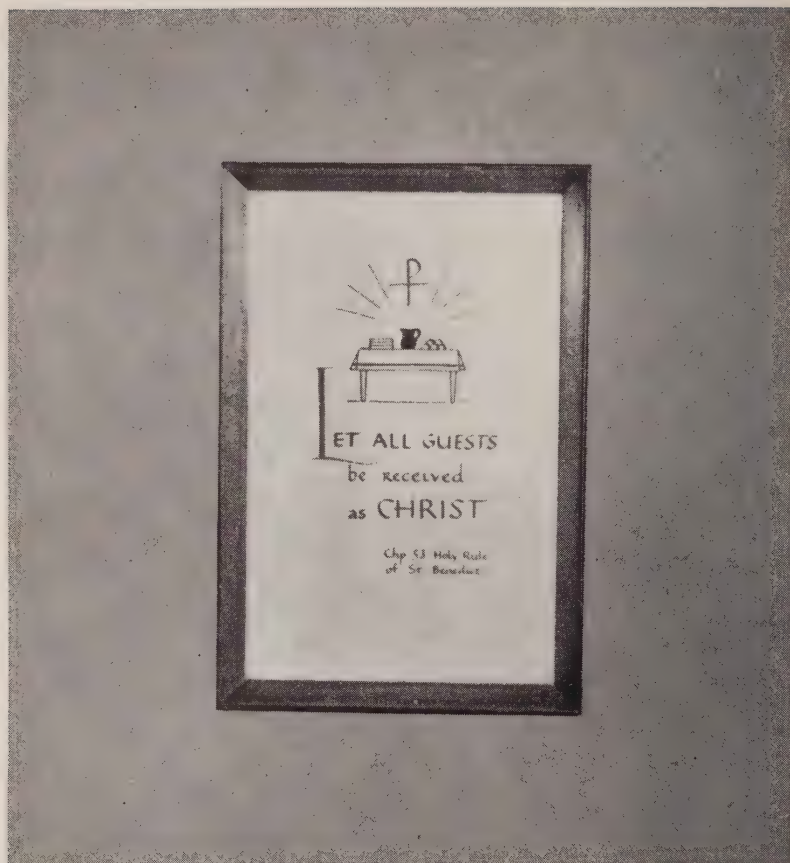
Again staffs met for a council of war. It was decided that we all would go to the hearing for the MacTavish boy the next day, and explain to the court what was happening on Henry Street.

Following the hearing, at which nothing much was accomplished save treating the astonished Judge to a raucous East Side meeting, we all rode home on the Madison Street bus. Mrs. MacTavish proclaimed that the Judge had insulted me—'and him a priest of the Church.' (The MacTavishes came to church on Easter and Christmas.) Furthermore, she declared, the lousy cops wanted all our boys to kill each other.

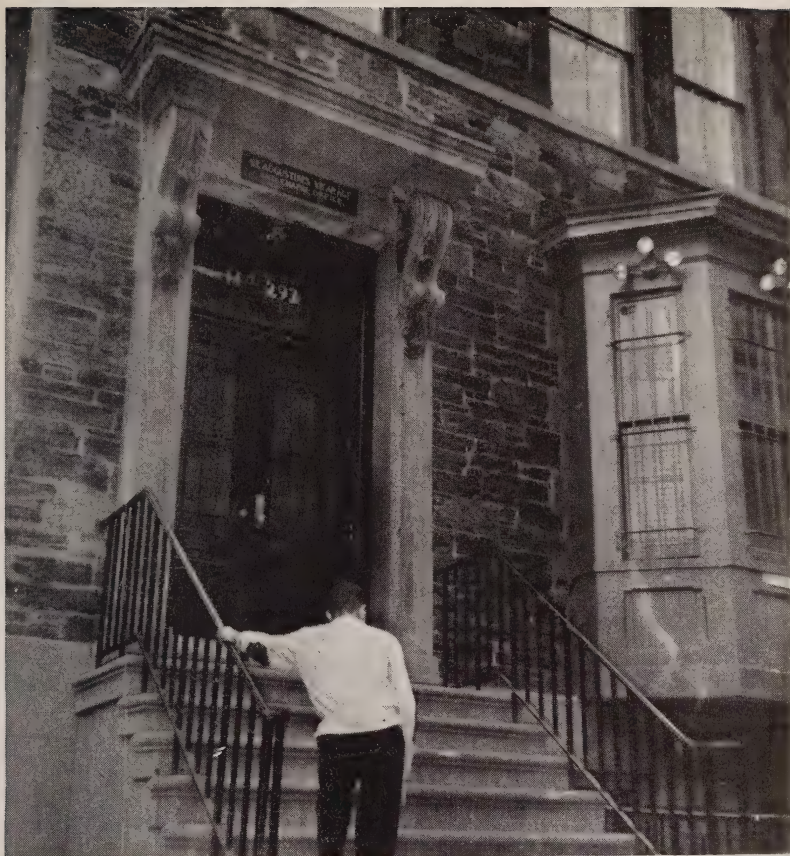
God forgive me, but this was the key: the ~~Lower East~~



The Lower East Side



The Frame of Reference



A House of Hospitality



EWING GALLOWAY, N. Y.

Street Scene



The Candy Store



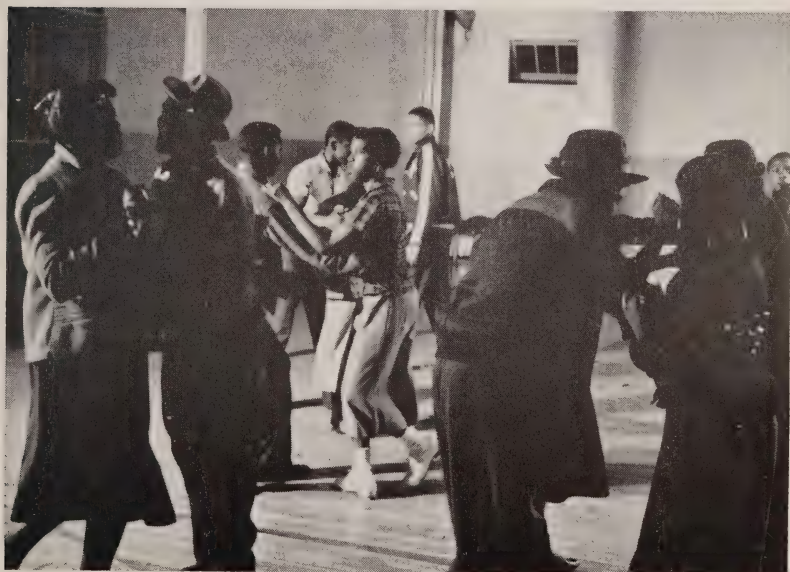
LEON HECHT, N. Y.

Fr. Wendt and Parishioners



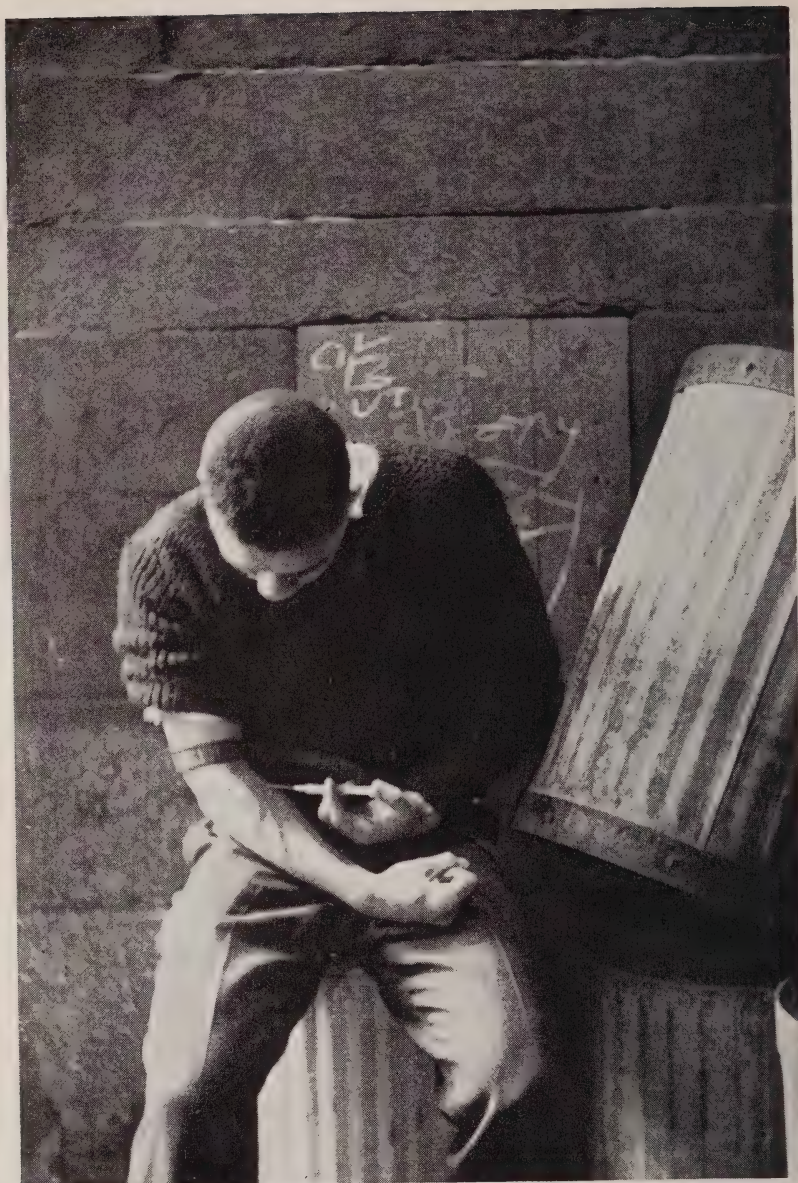
FRANK H. BAUER, N. Y.

Boxing at St. Christopher's



FRANK H. BAUER, N. Y.

A Set at St. Augustine's

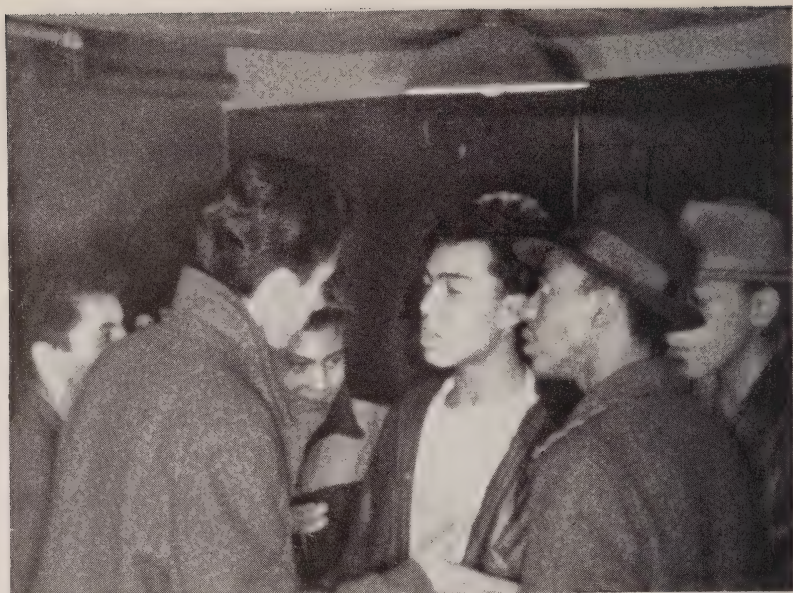


This . . .



ARTHUR LAVINE, N. Y.

. . . or this



A Council of War



FRANK H. BAUER, N. Y.

A Conference on Smack



The Church Fair Gets Under Way



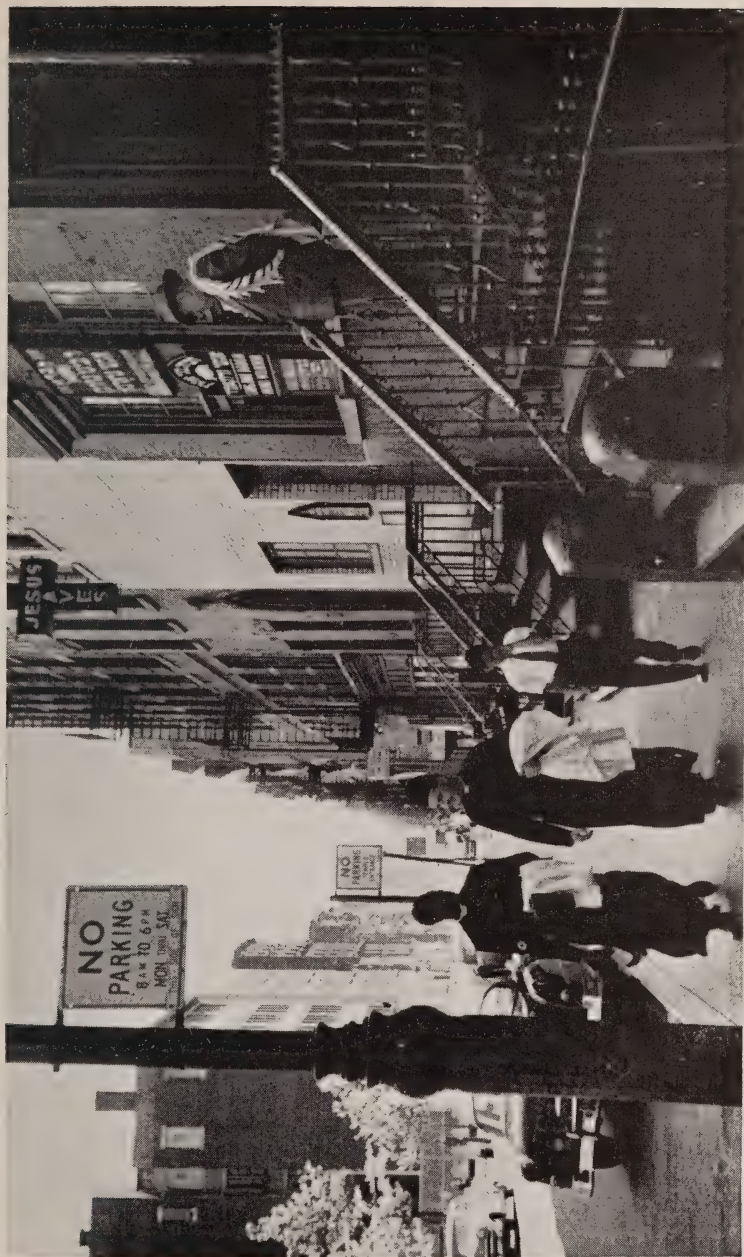
DAVID LINTON, N. Y.

Confirmation at St. Augustine's



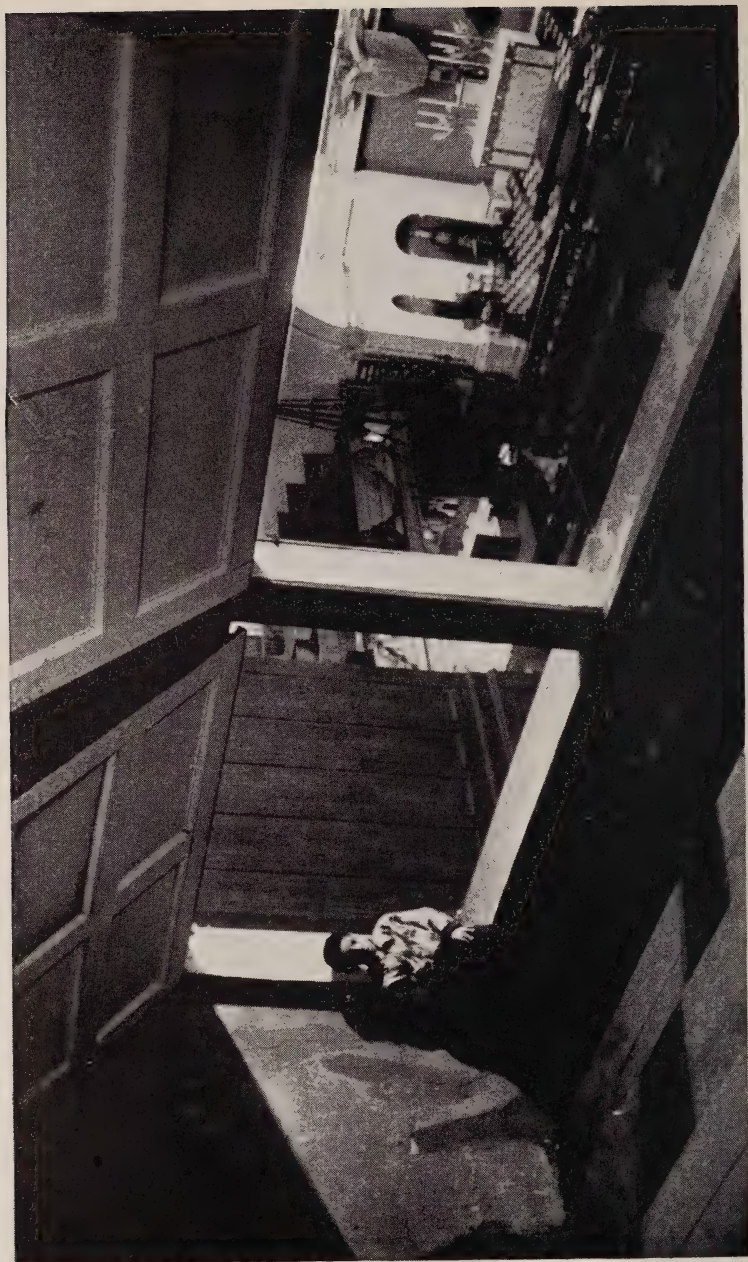
DAVID LINTON, N. Y.

Choir Boy at St. Augustine's



ARTHUR LAVINE, N. Y.

Fr. Myers and Neighbors



DAVID LINTON, N. Y.

St. Augustine's from the Old Slave Gallery

Side dislike of the police and the courts. Around this we could unite them all and then later explain the helpfulness of the Deputy and the Youth Squad. And so we planned a mass meeting as the bus rocked along the bumpy street.

Mimeographed handbills were made and distributed by school children. The meeting was called for the next night at Saint Augustine's. The entire neighborhood was invited, including the teenagers.

It was a wild meeting, that night. The parish hall was crowded and the young people sat on the window sills. Everyone, it seemed, made a speech. The crowded applauded and cheered every speech, because there was a common thread: how lousy the cops are. Mrs. Mac-Tavish had done her work well. Our good friends from the Seventh Precinct were present in plain clothes; we couldn't look them in the face.

Later that night our mission staff counted up the casualties of the week. Three kids had been stabbed and two badly beaten up with clubs. One boy sustained a fractured skull when hit on the head with a garbage can in Jackson Park. But the people now were united; they had had enough and they again were East Siders together.

The effect of the meeting on the Knights was tremendous. They now felt a part of the community and recognized their bond with the Mission. A nasty business had made us friends.

After Months of Testing

Chris was secretary of the Knights. He was a tall, well-built boy with dark brown skin and eyes that usually danced with happiness. He was, strange for a Knight, diligent in his attendance at high school and obtained fairly good marks. He began to go steadily with one of the loveliest girls in the parish, another odd business, considering the club's dim view of dating. We got into the habit of pointing to him as a fine example of what could be done with a gang member—even though he seldom came to church.

Chris spent a lot of his time at the Vicarage. He loved talking with our housekeeper who had a teenage boy of her own. In fact, Chris would talk willingly and happily with all of us about a multitude of subjects. He had dis-

covered a new world—one in which adults would take the time to listen to his opinions.

One day he came by the mission office on Madison Street and asked if he might see me about something important that night. We fixed the time. I wondered what was on his mind.

When he arrived later, he looked fairly desperate. He was halfway between tears and laughter, and feeling a little embarrassed.

‘Chris,’ I said, ‘You have got something to tell me. I’m tough skinned. Go ahead and shoot the works. A priest has heard about everything.’

He wanted to talk to me about his anger. He told me that there were times when he became so mad, as he put it, that he could not remember later what he had done. Sometimes he couldn’t even remember where he had been. He gave me an example. A few months ago there had been a basketball game at Saint Christopher’s Chapel gym. He was playing on the Saint Augustine’s team against a team from a church uptown. Suddenly a fight started over the referee’s decision. Not only were the players involved in the melee but also the spectators. He remembered rapping someone on the chin, and then becoming so angry at a foul blow which he witnessed that everything went blank. Later, when the fight was over, he found himself in a far corner of the gym ‘sort of talking to myself.’ What he had done during this interval or whom he had hit, he did not know. He was afraid of himself.

His coming to me, he said, had been brought on at the insistence of his girl in whom he had confided. She felt that he might do damage to himself or to someone else.

I asked Chris many questions about his anger: when he first had noticed it? how frequently these times occurred? I told him that I could perhaps help him if we could talk together many times at stated intervals. I said that we would have to do a lot of talking before I even could begin to understand what his trouble was. I asked him if he would mind my consulting a psychiatric social worker friend about important points. Perhaps later, if my friend thought it necessary, would Chris be willing to see him? He answered that he would do anything in order to be able to understand himself. We then talked for awhile about the way man is made. I used the analogy of the iceberg, most of which lies unseen below the surface of the sea, to explain in simple terms the existence of the unconscious. I tried to help him see that not all our acts are the result of our conscience or our conscious mind. He was feeling very guilty and sinful about his anger at that point.

We met together many times. I reported the substance of our conversations to my therapist friend who felt, after awhile, that it would be wise now to shift Chris over to him. We had had to undertake this step slowly because of Chris' antipathy to 'looney doctors,' as he called them. Chris had several months of visits with the therapist and seemed to get much better. At length he told me that for six months he had not had an angry period.

I do not recount all of this in order to embark upon a discussion of the boy's emotional problems as such. I speak of it in order to indicate that a new level of relationship had been reached between Chris and me. He came to look upon me as his spiritual father. And I knew that the other clergy also sensed a different relationship with him.

One day I asked him if ever he had considered being baptized. He answered in the negative. He previously had rejected Baptism, he said, because of his stepfather's ideas about the meaning of it. His stepfather, it developed, was an official of a Holiness church. Baptism meant, in the Holiness creed, an emotional experience born of beating drums, ecstatic shouts, and wild singing in a store-front church. It also meant, primarily in Chris' mind, giving up smoking, dancing, drinking and coming in off the evil streets shortly after dark.

This discussion led us to further talk about Chris' stepfather. Chris' whole relationship to him was colored by an event which I shall never forget. On the night that his mother married this man, Chris came out into the kitchen when she brought her new husband home. The young child wanted to see what his second father looked like. The man, noticing him standing in the shadows in his night shirt and resenting the intrusion, came over to him and struck him in the mouth with clenched fist. Chris' mouth filled with blood and he choked on his broken teeth.

Somehow Baptism and the blow in the mouth had become all confused and that was the deep-down reason why Chris was afraid of being baptized at Saint Augustine's.

A month later Chris suddenly said that he now had a different idea of Baptism. We had talked a great deal about the love of God for Chris, and somehow this had stirred about in his mind. And he had been shown love by the Church for the first time. He had not thought God's love for him was possible, nor ours. But now he knew that love and God and Baptism and the Mass were in a sense all one thing.

Chris was baptized on Easter Even. It was the climax to a wonderful service, during which the New Fire was kindled and the Paschal Candle lit and the organ played for the first time.

Behind him at the font stood Tom and Ralph and Willie and Sue and the rest of the Knights.

CHAPTER VI

Ralph

During the stormy history of the Knights, there were periods when small groups splintered away from the main body of the club. One such group, consisting of ten boys, regrouped into a club known as the Noble Kings.

At first these boys spoke of their action as a reform movement. They looked upon the Knights as be-bops and, undoubtedly, felt threatened by the superior physical power of the Knights' hard core. On one occasion the Knights' president and a few others had tied two members to a lamp post and had left them there. A kind passerby had released them several hours later. Several incidents like this had prompted these boys to leave the club. The Knights made no objection and, in fact, seemed happy to see them leave.

It was not long after the break, however, that we began receiving reports from the manager of a nearby housing project that a group of boys wearing Noble Kings' jackets was mugging adults in hallways and elevators. Jim, the youth cop, told us that he had added the Kings to his list of anti-social clubs. We noticed at this time that four or five lads had withdrawn from the Kings—the very ones who had spoken earlier of the new club as a reform movement. At the same time, the other boys, some of them strangers to us, began wearing club jackets. One of them we did know, an emotionally unstable boy who had been a Knight; he has since become a drug addict.

It seemed necessary at this point for us to assemble the Kings in order to discuss this serious turn of events. In a meeting to discuss this problem, it became clear to the mission staff that we should withdraw our recognition of the Noble Kings as a bona fide church club. We did this and informed the Kings as well as the settlement houses in this area.

Much later we learned that the break between the Knights and the Kings was much more profound than we had thought. Evidently there was a sharp difference of opinion between them, centering about the disturbed boy who later became a junkie. He had quietly worked on some of the less stable Knights, urging them to form a fighting club under his leadership. He played on their fear of the president and, at the same time, deceived a few of the better younger boys as to his real intentions. Most of this subversive activity had taken place on the front steps of the Vicarage! We had watched this lad but had underestimated his abilities.

Our attention had been drawn toward him initially

when he became involved in a burning which took place on the Vicarage steps. One summer night he and three of the future Kings, who were in tight with him, were sitting on the steps. The clergy on night duty felt that something was up but were unable to spot the nature of it. There was much running into the hallway and returning to the stoop. There were the usual whispered conversations. Then an automobile stopped in front of the building. The boys on the steps, panicked, all attempted to get through the Vicarage door at the same time. Three shots rang out and one of them, Johnny, fell to the porch floor. He had been shot in the thigh by a .22 revolver.

Shortly after this two of us rounded the corner of Scammel Street, returning from an evening off. We saw a huge crowd collected in front of the Vicarage and seven squad cars in the block. Hurrying into the house, we found Johnny stretched out on the floor of my bedroom, his blood staining the rug. He moaned with pain.

Nothing came of the incident. No one could identify the car or its occupants. Several people on the street had seen the car but, apparently, were afraid to talk. The boys involved could offer no reason why they should be shot at. They knew, of course. They would seek revenge in their own way . . . the movie and TV way, the way of nations and adults in our crazy world.

At any rate, shortly after the banning of the Noble Kings, I had an opportunity to talk with Ralph, one of the boys who had left the Kings. It was one of those rare occasions when no one disturbed a conversation and the telephone was silent. We talked of many matters for a long time. What he said was revealing and important. It told the story of the impact of church life upon at least one sensitive kid. It was a brief glimpse.

into the mind and spirit of an East Side youngster of seventeen years.

The general subject of our conversation was the church and the street. I told him quite frankly that I wanted his 'honest-to-God' thinking on this subject. He acted as though he were being honored by this request. He was pleased. He said that few adults really cared about what teenagers thought, that they didn't understand 'the teenage mind.'

Ralph came to the church two years before and promptly joined the Knights. He was active in all their affairs but seldom took part in the discussions at the weekly meetings. When we asked the Knights to help with church affairs, such as the annual street procession, he always was the first to volunteer. This pleased the balance of the club membership, all of whom vied with each other for the honor of being the last to volunteer. Our conversation soon revealed Ralph's increasingly deep involvement with church life.

'You know, Father, I'd like to be a social worker at the Chapel,' he said. 'I've watched how you do things here. I feel more at home here than, well, when I'm really home.'

I asked him if he saw any connection between the Sunday Eucharist and his feeling at home in the Chapel.

He replied, 'The Mass is a lot of people being close together. People are like as one and it's not like when you are out in the street. It's a big family with a different atmosphere. There are no separations in any way. And I like to sing, especially the Mass music, not the hymns. The Mass is not like being by yourself. You get a feeling, I don't know, a feeling.'

Knowing that he was confirmed, I asked him what receiving the Holy Communion meant to him.

He answered, 'When I receive the bread and wine, I ask for forgiveness. But I don't pray hard enough. I suppose it's one of the most important parts of the Mass, but I don't feel so. Maybe I don't understand it good enough.'

He paused awhile and then went on, 'It means what our Lord said, and we are supposed to remember Him. That's what is important. I remember Him because all my life I heard those wonderful stories about Him. Everything He did was good. In a way when I pray to Jesus you get a different feeling from anything else you do. All good things are part of God. When something happens that is real good, I think of Jesus.'

We then moved on to an attempt to relate the Holy Communion Service to the tense situation in the streets.

[In his opinion the important matter was how you really feel about one another as people. He felt that unless the kids came to grips with the problem of accepting each other there would be no solution to the gang problem.]

'It seems like they are ready to fight each other,' he said, referring to Negro kids, 'Even though they eat and sleep in each other's homes. Also, why do they come to dances and not dance? Everyone sits around. They all look unhappy. I can't blame the boys because the girls won't dance when you ask. The dances aren't fun. Sometimes girls don't want to be seen with you. It seems like they have to be careful with who they dance. They are very fussy about who they dance with.'

For him, it would appear, the problem of acceptance was somehow related to the dances. These were a sym-

bol to him of the way in which the kids rejected each other. He said that once he had attended a dance sponsored by the Spanish Society at Saint Christopher's. 'That was a real good dance, everyone danced with everyone else and no questions were asked. Even some ladies asked me if I would dance. I felt ashamed because I can't dance Spanish so well. They said they'd teach me. I don't see why the teenage dances can't be like that.'

I asked him what he thought of the grind.

He replied, 'I don't think it's right at all although I do it myself sometimes. There is a difference, there's more fun in clean dancing. With the grind everyone's quiet, not gay at all. When you leave the dance, you don't feel good even though you act like you do. It's just for the thrill of sex. It's not for fun. A dance is good when everyone is dressed up and all the lights are on and there is no grinding and you ask a girl to dance and you aren't embarrassed.'

'The Social Club had a dance like that at Shirley's house one time. (Shirley was a social worker at the Mission.) It was good, I guess, because we all knew each other. Also there was a dance at the Twenty-third Street 'Y' that was like that one up at Mary's. All the clubs got together and there was white kids there too.'

Ralph went on as though once he started he couldn't stop. He had to talk.

'At some house parties the guys go into the back room for a couple of bucks. Not at most house parties, I guess. And some guy stands at the door with a big knife to see that nothing happens. Usually beer is served at birthday parties; otherwise nothing. Mostly parents are away or they stay in the back room somewhere. More

often the back room parties are at a guy's house. Then his parents are not there.

'I was at one last month up in the projects when some white guys paid five dollars. On this night the girls came from Brooklyn. One white girl was grinding but she didn't do nothing. This seemed good—with the whites there and all. They were accepted to some extent. They tried to act like the Negro guys—'What's happening, man?'—and all that jive talk. Everyone was packing. Everyone hid their pieces when the cops came. You see, the white guys came out of the room and said they didn't get nothing. They began to holler. That's why the cops came. Several clubs tried to crash the party later but the cat with the knife scared them.'

I asked him if he thought house parties should be abolished.

His answer was, 'Yes . . . but come to think of it a lot hangs together, like gangs and bopping, the Lower East Side, drinking, pot. You'd have to clean up the whole mess. Guys fourteen years old get high. They live their whole lives too soon. They learn too much and they see too much. Sounding, the way they accept each other, everything is a curse, it all goes together. Maybe it's not that way among the whites. Maybe we are lost more, I don't know. Anyhow, I haven't been around the whites too much except in the church.'

We then began discussing how a fellow 'gets in' with a street club. He said that there was a formula.

'First you hang around, I guess, with one or two guys who are looked up to in the block. You talk jive, wear clothes like theirs, do the same thing they do; you walk the same way. You know how they walk, Father. You act cool all the time.

‘Pretty soon your connections with these cats who have a rep will get you in with almost everybody in the neighborhood.

‘With the girls, well, you have to have a steady—a girl that’s well known and is accepted by the guys who have a rep. You act cool, girls talk about you among themselves—you know.’

I understood. He went on, ‘Yes, a guy has to have a rep. It helps if you’re good at sex and cool about all that kind of thing. I don’t understand it. I used to think I did but that was before I came here. Now I don’t know what the girls want. Sometimes I think they like a junkie better than an ordinary guy. They want excitement, something different.’

I raised the question of standards of acceptance. Were they a lot different in the social club? His face lighted when I mentioned the social club.

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘When we started the social club, it was understood that we all were going to accept each other. It took a long time though. I don’t know how Mary stood us with the sounding and all. The colored sounded the Puerto Ricans and they all walked out. But they came back.

‘The whole mood was different. Even the dances were different from the big ones at the church. At the church dances there are so many and, well, they all looked unhappy. In the club everyone was trying to act different—even with the whites.

‘This is the way we can be, how we really want to be. That’s what I think. At the big dances there was no real acceptance. At Mass and the coffee hour you feel accepted, even by older people. People at the church seem that way even if they are putting on an act. That’s the

way they really want to be. To tell you the truth, Sunday is my best day.'

Ralph then returned to the house parties as though they were on his conscience.

'You know, I went to them so that I could get in with the guys. I wanted a rep too. I paid two bucks once but not much happened. Guess I was afraid the cops would come, or the guy's mother.

'I couldn't keep my eyes off her. Then I began to sweat. Everything went through my mind. I guess I really didn't want it that way and I took off.'

How did he feel now that he was out of the Kings, I asked.

'To tell you the truth,' he answered, 'The only thing that saves me is the social club and the chapel, coming here and all. And there are a lot of guys like me, in the same boat. You'd better look out for them, Father.'

I sat at the table thinking after he closed the door. The disturbing question he raised was this, 'Will the Church, the Mission in this case, be able to support him enough so that he can reach the point at which by his own strength he might avoid being lost in the world of the streets? Can we help him strengthen his ties to the altar of God so that he will remain a faithful son of the Church? Or would the understandable desire to find acceptance in his own peer group prove to be the stronger force in his life?'

There are many Ralphs in the Mission. There are scores of girls who are also caught between these two forces. We have seen teenagers slowly but inexorably drift away from the life of the church. Limitations of the staff, too few consecrated laymen, make it impossible

always to prevent the drift. We are crushed almost with the numbers of young people who desperately need help. We talk of realistic goals and of the necessity of determining what our limitations are. We discuss restricting the number of children permitted to enter the church program. It is a cruel business, this rejection of children when in their often non-verbal way they cry for help.

Again it goes back to the matter of love and our lack of it. We return, as we must, to a fresh exploration of the wonderful world of prayer knowing that a holy conversation with Our Lord replenishes love of self and the neighbor. Then the love story of the parish may go on and the cords of relationships lengthen and strengthen.

I once read a pamphlet entitled, 'Reaching the Unreached.' The title implies that social workers or somebody must reach out in order to make contact with the rejected and lost. In the situation of the true parish it is the unreached who crowd in from everywhere holding out their hands for ours. The horrible possibility is that Christians will look directly upon those eloquent hands and not see them.

CHAPTER VII

Jerry

When the Knights first came to the Vicarage, Jerry was with them. Once they began to feel at home with us, he came to the Vicarage every afternoon immediately after school, just hanging around; and on week-ends he was a permanent fixture.

Jerry, we came to learn, lived on Lewis Street with his father. His mother had been dead for many years. After her death Jerry had had to get used to the succession of women with whom his father lived from time to time. Under these circumstances he seldom wanted to stay at home. Later we learned that his father was a 'pusher' of sorts and that Jerry had been on occasion his unwilling accomplice.

Jerry, eighteen years old, was tall and slender. He

always wore the same clothes—a dirty grey sweatshirt and dungarees, except in cold weather when a leather jacket was added to his outfit. Sometimes he would ask if he might take a shower in the spare bathroom of the Vicarage.

Well after midnight one morning, the Vicarage doorbell rang. Don, a seminarian living with us during the summer, came to my room to say that it was Jerry. When we talked with him, he informed us that his father had disappeared several days before; and that since the rent was past due, the landlord had affixed a padlock to the door while he was out and now he had no place to go.

We put the boy up for the night and, as it turned out, for many nights to come. Every effort to locate his father and some relatives in Brooklyn failed. Jerry was on our hands. When we secured a job for him, he either would fail to report to work or would quarrel with the boss. We sent him to a vocational clinic and, acting on their advice, got him a job in which he might be happy. It was to no avail. Finally we told him that he would have to go on his own. We gave him money for a room and arranged an appointment with a job agency. We explained to him that we weren't doing him any good by letting him hang around. He left and we waited to see what would happen.

We did not see Jerry for several days. Then one night we did see him, but he did not see us—he was dead.

The story that we pieced together later was this: Jerry went to the room that had been rented for him, but he didn't do anything about his appointment with the job agency. Desperate when his two weeks rent was up, he attempted to mug a man on Henry Street. The man resisted long enough for the police to arrive. Then when

Jerry fled down Montgomery Street and failed to halt at the cop's command, he was shot dead.

He was lying in the street beside a fire-hydrant when we reached him.

What's happenin', man? You got troubles? Yea, we all got troubles. The trouble with trouble is more trouble. What's shakin', man? Oh, nothin.' Got a few dimes in my pocket. Guess I'll head for the old lady's pad. It's uptown, only ten stops.

Cool, man, cool. You ain't got all night. Yeh, your hands are warm baby. How about a kiss?

God, it's cold and the street looks dark. Guess I'll move along easy and guess I'll hit him and run.

Man, that old pump is big. I don't know, it's running water and it's summer. First thing you know I'm on Lewis Street. . . . Maybe they should have put me out. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

The Tough Job

In dealing with conflict groups among teenagers, one frequently has to make a drastic decision about some individuals within the group. For example, if after some time it becomes clear that conditions within the group will not improve unless a certain member is removed from his role of leadership, it may then be necessary to go to extreme lengths to do just that. Many times it cannot be done until that person runs afoul the law. After an arrest is made, those concerned with the gang must determine what position should be taken with the court. If the boy should be removed from the community, who will take the responsibility of appearing before the Judge to apprise him of the role of that boy in the neighborhood? Ordinarily we have done this on a community and

inter-agency basis. Through the efforts of a remarkable community organization known as the Lower East Side Neighborhoods Association (LENA) we have developed what we call 'action teams' to work with conflict groups. When the problem arises of having to deal with individuals within a conflict group it becomes the responsibility of the action group to make court appearances as well as to undertake the needed social and psychiatric studies of the individual. Ordinarily the action team will consist of a clergyman, a psychiatric social worker, a medical doctor, a group worker and a lawyer. These action teams frequently have met for hours in the painful effort to reach a common agreement about a gang member. When a consensus is arrived at, members of the action team then take the responsibility of making the court appearances.)

Obviously, the work of the action team quite frequently incurs the enmity of the particular gang with which the team is working. It is very difficult for members of a street club to understand why elders in the community are interested in getting a member of the club off the streets and out of the way. This means that a most careful job of interpretation to the members of the street club must be undertaken. Also, it is important that the action team inform the individual in question as to what its stand will be and interpret for him the reasons for it. Nothing is done or contemplated unless there is full knowledge of the action on the part of both the club and the individual involved. It is pointed out to the club that the action team has a responsibility to the community, to the club, and to the individual member of the gang, as well as to other teenagers in the neighborhood who might be hurt or killed as a result of this person's continued

presence in the community. Even though painfully careful explanations are given repeatedly, it is not likely that a club always will be satisfied. There then ensues a period of time during which the club may be on the outs with members of the action team and agencies which they represent. However, it has been my experience that in the long run clubs respect clergy and social workers much more when they see that these elders do not step out of the role which they are expected to play. If I can be trusted always as a priest to take a stand for law, order and community justice, juveniles in the long run feel much more comfortable about me. On the other hand, if I seem to condone in any way what they fully know is wrong, my role with them is highly endangered. I return to the point made earlier that there must be no suggestion of 'ratting' on a club. This possibility is removed if the steps which either the priests, the social worker, or the action team are about to take are fully understood and known about in advance by the club.

The case of Tony is a good example of the way in which an action team works. Tony was picked up by the police on a charge of attempted burglary. Our neighborhood action team was made aware of this situation through the good offices of the priest who acts as the Episcopal Bishop's missionary to the courts. We held a long meeting during which we discussed what steps we might take. It finally was decided that we should seek a conference with the Judge in his chambers prior to the court session at which Tony would appear. We gathered together all the known information about Tony and prepared it for the use of the presiding Judge. Tony, to the best of our knowledge, had not only been involved in every street

rumble for the past six or eight months, but also had instigated several of them. He was known to have carried weapons on innumerable occasions. It was reported to us by other teenagers that Tony was considered 'crazy.' They meant by this that when in possession of a weapon, and angry at the same time, no one knew exactly what he would do. On one occasion he threatened a crowd of several hundred teenagers with a pistol.

In our assessment of the situation in the street club to which he belonged we concluded that if we were to neutralize the activity of this group, Tony must be removed somehow from his position of leadership. Our next step was to tell Tony what we planned to do. The lad at the time was out on bail. We informed him that we intended to ask that the bail be raised when he next appeared before the Judge. We then told him that he needed some psychiatric help and that the City could give this to him. This position also was interpreted to his mother who accepted it as a way out. We then called together his street club and explained to them what we planned to do. Our explanation was received with considerable hostility and the group left the room in an angry mood.

We were able to talk to the Judge and to the Assistant District Attorney representing the people at this trial. The Court accepted our judgment in this matter and Tony was remanded to a municipal psychiatric clinic for a thorough examination. We informed the Judge that in the event that the clinic felt Tony could be returned to the neighborhood, we would offer further psychiatric help to him. The Judge appeared to be very gratified that a neighborhood group of responsible citizens took an interest in a boy like Tony. He remarked that there

would be far fewer juvenile delinquents if this were the case generally.

We have faced judges who were not so cooperative but who seemed to resent our 'interference.' All of us firmly believe that something should be worked out between the courts and community organizations such as the Lower East Side Neighborhoods Association which are interested in the welfare of our troubled children. Sometimes we have gone to great lengths in having teenagers given psychological examinations, and have thoroughly discussed the problem with all agency people in the neighborhood with whom the child has been involved only to have our testimony ignored by the court.

Another difficulty which we have had to face is that of religious affiliation. Very frequently a Puerto Rican youth will appear before the court listed as a Roman Catholic. Usually his relationship to that particular denomination is very tenuous indeed. However, even though we as Anglican clergymen have been the only ones interested in his welfare, it is impossible for us to stand with him through the court experience. This is because of the practice of the courts to recognize only those of the same religious denomination as that of the child. It is well known that the vast majority of Puerto Ricans have no real church affiliation. Nevertheless it is the practice of the Roman Catholic Church to count all members of that ethnic group as bona fide Roman Catholics.

Probation officers are divided among the three religious groups. In this scheme only Roman Catholic probation officers may work with Roman Catholic youngsters, etc. It is the opinion of many of us that probation officers should be selected on the basis of their ability and their

insight into the nature of youthful problems, and not their religion. We also feel that a probation officer should be assigned to a particular type of case because of his knowledge of it rather than on the basis of the religion of the youngster. I am not so concerned, therefore, whether the probation officer is a Roman Catholic or a Protestant if he is sympathetic and well trained.

CHAPTER IX

Tino

Tino was a member of the Knights and served for a short time as their treasurer. But his term of office was ended abruptly when the members discovered that he had spent some of their funds on himself. He was continued, however, as a club member on the promise that he would return the money. This he never did.

Tino lived with his mother and older brother in a housing project. His father had left home some years before and had not been heard from since. The mother, when I first met Tino, was living with another man.

Tino seemed to be an outgoing boy and to get along well with his fellows. In physical appearance he was of medium height, brown-skinned, with clean cut features.

He wore his hair slicked back with much grease. He had many gifts—he played the piano extraordinarily well and, having a good voice, he was happy to sing for the crowd whenever asked. Another of his accomplishments was his ability to dance so well that the girls considered it an honor to be his partner. He was, all in all, very much the lady's man.

Tino also possessed a considerable reputation as a fighter, and whenever there was a rumble, he was sure to be in the middle of it. He had been confirmed at the age of ten but was irregular in his church attendance. Occasionally he would be overtaken with feelings of guilt and remorse about this and would, in these periods, be very faithful.

With so many hundreds of young people milling about us all the time, it is difficult to center attention on any one of them for very long. Tino's difficulties, therefore, did not come to our attention until he had gone beserk in high school and the principal called us to a conference. It was decided at this conference that Tino ought to be under the care of a psychiatrist, and we undertook to see that this was done.

In the course of this treatment it came out that Tino was having horrible nightmares, dreaming that someone was invading the house, that there were people after him all the time. In these nightmares he would cry out in his sleep and disturb the whole household. After many more consultations with the doctor it was finally revealed that he was intensely jealous of his mother's lover and that, in fact, he hated him with all his heart. He also hated his mother for having a man other than his father sleeping with her. He told how it disturbed and upset

him to hear them in the next room. He described his unsuccessful attempts to find his father.

For Tino it was, indeed, life without father. While one hesitates to generalize about the problem, we know that a great many delinquent boys and girls come from broken homes. Certainly the separation of father and mother has a great deal to do with the behavior of children. The treatment of Tino by the psychiatrist came to an end principally because there was not enough money to continue the relationship. So very often this is the case—not enough money or no psychiatrist available.

When his visits to the psychiatrist stopped, Tino began to act very strangely. He would appear at the Vicarage with liquor on his breath, yet not behaving as though he were high. It was when we saw him in the company of two of the neighborhood junkies that we knew what was happening. Within the space of only a few weeks he moved on from smoking marijuana and smack to main-lining—that is, to injecting heroin directly into his veins. He lost interest in girls and stopped playing basketball. He began to lose weight and went around sloppily dressed. He was always chewing on candy or drinking soda—a sure give away. I remember observing him sitting on the bench next to the housing project with two other junkies. They were not engaged in conversation; they were simply looking and scratching. The picture they presented was ludicrous—and tragic.

After a month or two Tino was arrested on suspicion of mugging, but he was released for lack of evidence. We knew then that we would have to move fast if we were to save this boy. So one evening when I saw him in the hall outside my office, I took advantage of the opportunity literally to haul him into the room. After

the door was closed and Tino seated, I bluntly accused him of being on dope, telling him that I had all the evidence and that it would be foolish for him to lie to me. After some struggle he finally admitted to using heroin. I then proceeded to paint, in the most forceful way I could, the fate of a drug addict. I don't believe I left out any detail of that picture, including the eventual loss of virility, which was the element that seemed to shock him most. I then suggested that he permit me to ease him into Riverside Hospital for treatment. He agreed and with that we shook hands and he was about to leave when I called him back and asked him if he did not think that it was his responsibility to tell the other junkies that I would do the same for them if they so desired. He promised me that he would talk to them.

Tino kept his agreement and did speak to two of his addict companions; they also consented to go to Riverside. We arranged this through the Probation Department and the boys were admitted to the hospital.

Eight months later Tino was released from Riverside. He came directly to the church, and we had a long talk about his experience and about the future. Tino was full of hope and eager to find a job as quickly as possible. I promised help and immediately set about getting a job for him. After one or two failures we were successful in getting him a part-time job as messenger.

One morning he came to the church to tell us that he had lost his job. He was very downhearted and discouraged. I asked him if he would like me to try to get another job for him, and he said yes. This time it took a week or two before I even got a nibble. Those two weeks were fatal, for almost immediately Tino fell in with some junkies in the neighborhood, and before we knew it, he

was hooked again. This time he refused to go back to the hospital because, as he said, *they* could do nothing for him. Nor were we able to persuade him to return.

As the weeks and months went by, Tino deteriorated before our very eyes. We knew that he was involved both in robberies and muggings, but since we could not prove it, we could not force him to return to the hospital through police action. Meanwhile, since his daily doses of heroin were increasing, he was needing more and more money to pay for them. It was not long before he committed a crime for which he was caught red-handed by the police. Although we went to court with him and requested that he be sent back to Riverside, the Judge sitting that morning refused our plea and sentenced Tino to Elmira Reception Center, where he underwent the cold turkey treatment—that is, he had to go through that terrible period of sickness that drug addicts must endure when heroin is removed from their reach.

Tino served his year sentence in Elmira and, upon release, returned once again to the church. And again we had a long heart to heart talk—in fact, a great many of them. And again he got a job, then another, then still another—losing them all. Finally he was seen once more walking the back streets with his friends, the junkies.

There was only one course of action for us to take—to report Tino's behavior, and our suspicions, to his probation officer. This was done, and the examination of Tino's arms, ordered by the probation officer, confirmed what we suspected. Again Tino was remanded into the custody of the Court. Again Tino is in jail.

I wonder what we failed to do with Tino? We talked with him, prayed with him, heard his confession. It was of no avail. Tino was afflicted with a dread disease—a

disease about which little is known. The percentage of those cured is very small indeed, according to the official figures of the health departments. Once his emotional deterioration had thrown him into the use of drugs the problem then became a physical one. His body needed narcotics in order to function. He preferred to live in the dreamy, unreal world of the dope addict. He could no longer face life as it confronted him and so chose this avenue of escape. There remains a question for speculation: what would Tino have been like had he enjoyed the blessing of a decent family life?

It must be said that we have failed with many more than we have been able to help. That is why the one step forward is always accompanied with two steps backward. Our failures are largely due to our unwillingness to cast our many burdens upon the Lord Himself. I felt the cogency of this the other day when I received a letter from a boy who was in prison. I had not seen him for eight years. He had been a member of the Parish of Grace Church in Jersey City. He said something at one point in his letter which I shall never forget. 'I remember something you said to me once,' he wrote. 'You said that no matter what happened God still would be my friend. I have not forgotten this. I only wish that my real father down here had not forgotten me.' I did not remember ever having said this, but somehow God permitted me to plant a seed and He nourished it. This lad, and Tino, Bob and all the rest have been dying slowly because of lack of love. May God teach us to become lovers of Him so that we may become lovers of men.

This discussion may seem to be a far cry from Tino

and his problem. If, however, we get too far away from Tino and his problems we will not be able to meet the challenge of which I speak. Let us first of all, be concerned with men, their relationship with each other and with God. I am not questioning the premise of our classical theologians that all systematic theology must begin with God. I simply ask that somehow man and his real life enter the picture somewhere. The pastor is concerned principally with relationships—relationships between man and man, and man and God. He sees in the area of his concern both the depravity and the grandeur of human nature. Both these, and the human characteristics that lie in between, he sees also in a relationship—that is, in a relationship to himself as priest and pastor. His days are filled with the excitement, tension, and romance of daily living. He finds himself caught up in it and, indeed, cannot escape it if he is a true pastor and priest. He constantly deals with forces which he can see as well as with those others which are invisible. The age in which both angels and demons were treated with familiarity was perhaps the best age for a true pastoral relationship. Certainly the world of the Knights is close to that of these unseen beings.

The plight of Tino and the others underscores the critical need in parishes such as ours for psychiatric training of staff members. I am convinced that the clergy should receive as much of this type of training as possible and that, wherever it is feasible, there be on the staff at least a psychiatric social worker. Perhaps it should be required of every priest that he himself be analyzed, not only in order that he may understand the difficulties of others but in order to help him determine the nature of his own role as a pastor.

Only a fragment of the real life of each man is visible in terms of his rationality. All of those forces which decisively determine so much of his action are beneath the surface. This fact—one of the most revolutionary discoveries of our age—makes imperative a rethinking of the whole field of moral theology. A priest who becomes involved in the lives of his parishioners soon becomes aware of this. He begins to see that much that he learned in terms of traditional moral and pastoral theology is obsolete. He longs for the day when our seminaries will begin to catch up with what is now known of the unconscious life. Perhaps this is too early, but in any event the scholars among us ought to be prepared to begin an evaluation of this critical area. I am not proposing, of course, that every priest become a psychoanalyst. I think that it is dangerous when clergy attempt to act in this role. What I am talking about is the place of judgment in our appraisal of people's moral life. I must confess that it has become increasingly difficult for me to judge at all. When I see, for example, the moral consequences of emotional disintegration, such as Tino's, I wonder just how we as clergy can sit as judges. The objective moral code must, of course, be upheld for the sake of the peace of the human community. It is the area of correction and sentencing which needs to be re-explored. One doubts the rehabilitating effectiveness of the prison and penitentiary system; he is apt to conclude that this system only aggravates the personal problem.

I am not suggesting that every infraction of the law is due to emotional instability and sickness, however deeply rooted in the unconscious. But the line between such sickness and rational disobedience of the law and the moral code is very thin, indeed. 'Man's decisions are not

just the result of his conscience.' Tino's life had been such a complete mess that he needed to be helped in such a way that he could begin to live with himself. He had never known that normal love which a child needs in order to survive in this world. He belonged to that great company of the unloved. These deep needs of his will never be met by the kind of treatment which he receives in a penitentiary. When his sentence is served and he is released, it will be a more hardened Tino that emerges through the prison gates. The problem that he creates for society will not only remain but will be accentuated.

When we, as clergy and social workers, represent this general point of view we are accused of having stars in our eyes and of being totally naive. We are told by the members of the punitive camp that society would soon be in a shambles were we to have our way. It is extremely difficult to accept this judgment when one sees a world on the brink of self-annihilation. Our friends on the punitive side seem to be unable to see the similarity between the anti-social behavior of a street gang and that of an army legalized by the 'moral' code of a nation. One of their numbers recently criticized our mediation of a gang dispute by likening it to the ill-fated conference at Munich. He stated that we all have seen the results of Munich and that the Police Department, too, has seen the results of mediation between gangs. This whole issue may become so easily confused. Alfred North Whitehead once remarked something to the effect that the simple solution is usually the bogus solution. [There is a crying need for the crime prevention forces and the punitive forces to get together for long, heart to heart discussions.] It is clear that here we have

two conflicting ideologies. But the question is not one of black or white; it is not a conflict between the peace-makers and the warmongers.

A leading theologian of our Church once accused us of being sentimental in our approach to youngsters. I can easily see how it might seem so to him—isolated as he is behind the walls of a seminary. I only wish that his vast knowledge might be brought to bear upon the existential situation. This, I suppose, would not be possible unless somehow he himself became involved in that situation. Having been a teacher in a seminary, I know how easy it is to make pronouncements from the platform of a lecture hall. I now have come to see how difficult it is to make any pronouncements at all. But we who are engaged in work of this sort desperately need the advice and assistance of those theologians and scholars in our Church, and in others, who have not insulated themselves from the sordid and difficult facts of modern life.

The cleavage between the parochial ministry and the scholars of the Episcopal Church is wide, indeed. It has been remarked that most of our seminaries are doing a perfectly splendid job in training clergy for service in the Nineteenth-Century Church. There appears to be a far greater willingness among our Protestant and Roman brethren to delve daringly into the grievous problems besetting our age, and in this way to test anew the eternal validity of the Christian religion. The witness of Anglicanism in this respect is a weak one. In our great Communion one detects very little of that enthusiasm so characteristic of many in other Communions as the Church faces the Western World which now is missionary territory. I firmly believe that our Church, with its

freedom and great tradition, is in a position to explore this vast, and often frightening, area of psychiatry and moral theology, correction and judgment. This area comprises a great part of what we mean when we use the expression—'the modern world.' It is to be hoped devoutly that we will leave off fighting windmills and get down to the work of challenging the hearts and minds of modern men once again. I can think of no better place in which to begin than here.

A parish such as this . . . so filled with darkness, defeat . . . and a longing for victory. We wonder whether we should be here as priests and social workers. We think of next year and the year after that. We are not sure that we have the strength or that we can ask for it. The shouts in the streets become an unending shout. The angry cry mingles with music from the tenement. There is the odor of Sunday morning's garbage and the stench of urine in the hallway. There is the scream of the police siren. Will it stop in the block? There is the uncertainty at each youth affair. Will someone be shot or stabbed?

Do we love them all, our dear people? I see Johnny lying on the floor of the Vicarage, his brown skin split by a deep red gash. I see Tino, scratching, pacing up and down, then sleeping bolt upright at a noisy dance, hooked. I see Mary, her young stomach bulging, the cause lost in a series of hurried encounters behind the stairs, or on the roof during a warm summer night. I see May, drunk on Delancey Street, and later, I rush to her house to watch the fireman carry out two of her unwatched babies, burned to a dark nothing. I see her son, aged ten, with his seared flesh hanging from his

body and I hear his screams. I note the scar on Jamie's face and remember the rat's attack the year before as he lay sleeping.

We watch the waste of emotion—the result of what my people, the white people, have done to these brown people . . . the self-hatred, the choking feeling of continued entombment. I watch the quick learning of hatred by children and am plunged into despair over what may be done to prevent it.

Do we love them all, *all*—the hated and the haters, all victims, the disabled and the crippled? These are questions hard to ask and even harder to answer. It is not easy to keep a perspective in the midst of all this, and yet we must. *We must look, and although tears fill our eyes, we must be strong and know what we are doing.*

One never ceases to be amazed at the devotion of Father Wainwright who not once in thirty years slept outside his parish of St. Peter's, London Docks. He fed daily at the Table of God where his own human love was replenished by the Divine Love. He established the priority of prayer and this made him as an alabaster vase through which the Holy shone. Men and women, little children, looked upon him and then through and beyond this parish priest to the Ground of all goodness and love.

As we are given grace to look into the depths of the meaning of parish, ministry, Church, it becomes clearer that all that matters, really, is love. All that matters is that in the heart of the priest there is the love of God. All that matters is the preaching of Him in whose loving Heart the power and justice of God are united. All that matters is the continual offering in time and space of the Memorial of the one, perfect, complete Act of Love

in the Passion and in the death of Jesus upon the cross. What matters is that within the context of all of this the lines of love between people are multiplied and cross in a pattern of wondrous beauty.

Perhaps one must himself suffer to see this, must live in loneliness and have tasted the bitterness of remorse and guilt. If this be true, may I, and all of us, walk through the dark valley. This, of course, we do by our common humanity. But may we *know* what we do! May we read from the Book of the Cross to discover the meaning of our despair!

And then this doing and this knowing will not remain hidden behind the high wall of self. There will be a sharing, a walking among the diseased and an assumption, partial though it must be, of the pain of those afflicted.

The special danger of the minister among the dispossessed is that in the daily walking he does not see; and not seeing can result in utter failure in this special Christian kind of doing, this action, which is a sharing in the spirit of what is borne, often unknowingly, by multitudes of men all over the world.

CHAPTER X

The Pres Is a Bully

Several events prompted our calling together the Knights for what was billed as an important meeting. Word had come to us that three of them had been involved in a recent mugging in the neighborhood. It couldn't be proven, of course. The week before someone had turned off all the lights at the conclusion of a club meeting in the basement, whereupon the membership proceeded to throw furniture around in the darkness. The social worker with them had been forced to take cover under a pool table. A priest had to be summoned to restore order and evict them from the premises.

Only a few days before this incident several of the Knights had coolly smashed all the electric light bulbs in an office, using paper clips and rubber bands fashioned

as rough sling-shots. Furthermore, the Knights had been abusive to staff members and had disrupted the office routine during the day. Needless to say, many of them were not attending school and were unemployed.

Prior to the meeting members of the staff had met to decide what action should be taken. Some felt that the Knights were quite beyond our help and that we should, therefore, exclude them from the youth program. All were convinced that strong disciplinary action should be taken—action strong enough to impress even the Knights. There was much discussion about finding the kind of punishment that would make some sense to the club and at the same time help them.

We finally decided to put on paper all the negative qualities of each member. A committee was delegated to see that this was done. Each staff person was to hand to it all of the bad things he knew about every Knight. This lengthy and very impressive list was then handed to me.

During a conversation with Tom and Chris I hinted the existence of the list. I suggested that it might well be used in some way at the next meeting. And so, according to staff plan, the word about the list traveled like wildfire through the teenage population of the Mission. We felt sure that attendance at the Monday night meeting would set a record. And it did.

The whole club arrived, not at nine o'clock, not at the scheduled hour of eight—but at seven-thirty! And the boys demanded that the meeting begin at once since there was so much business to discuss. We made them wait.

I leisurely finished coffee and then sauntered down to the front office. The boys sat ranged around the wall. I

took a chair behind the desk. After keeping them in suspense a few minutes while I grimly sorted papers, I announced that it was true that the mission staff had made up a list of all the undesirable qualities of the club members. I added that the entire subject was extremely painful to me and to all the staff.

They were indignant and wanted to know who had helped write the 'paper'—I had designated it as *The White Paper!* One lad charged that the very name of the list proved that the staff was prejudiced. Another wanted to know by what authority the staff had drawn up such a document. Chris suggested that the Knights sue the Chapel. There followed a heated discussion over what they would do with the money if they won the case. I could see that the list had upset them considerably. Some demanded that Father Love and I tell them who was *not* on the list. Father Love said that this was manifestly impossible. Others suggested that I simply read the paper to them. I replied that although this was impossible it might be better to see each club member privately to discuss his faults. This was unanimously rejected by a roaring voice vote and I then proceeded to read *The White Paper*. I called off the first name, that of the Pres, Tom.

The room was dead silent. The boys sat on the edge of their chairs, eyeing me with concentrated attention. Only a couple disguised their interest by feigning sleep.

'Tom,' I read, 'you are a bully.' Even the sleepers opened their eyes. One could have heard a pin drop in the room.

Slowly Tom eased his huge frame out of the chair—incidentally, the best chair in the office—and came toward the desk looking straight at me the whole time.

Putting his hands on the desk, he leaned over until his face was about twelve inches from mine.

'What did you say?' he demanded in a voice just above a whisper. I did not answer but continued to hold his gaze.

'What did you say I was?' he roared.

'I said, Tom, that the first comment after your name is to the effect that you are a bully.'

'So, the comment is that I am a bully!' he roared again. Slowly he straightened up, his eyes blazing. He looked around the room wildly. 'Who called me a bully?' he shouted at the club.

The members stirred uneasily in their seats. Then he walked over to the smallest member of the club, clutched the boy's coat collar and yanked him to his feet. He shook the frightened Knight violently and then, loosening his grasp, let the boy fall to the floor. From the back of the room a quiet voice said, 'See?'

Tom reacted as though someone had shot him. For a moment he again looked wildly about the room and then, throwing open the door, dashed into the hall. From the bang of the front door we knew that he had left the building.

I waited several minutes—mainly that I might recover myself—and then called out the next name, Tino. 'The first thing after your name is this: We feel that you do a lot of sounding to stir up trouble both in the club and out of it. You start fights and then you. . . .' I did not finish because at that point the door flew open and in rushed Tom.

He came directly to the desk and once more leaned over it with his hands resting on the top. Looking directly at me he said simply, 'You are right.'

We were stunned. This was not Tom, at all. Tom never admitted anything to anybody. He was King of the Hill. He was never wrong. For years he had dominated the club because of his size and strength. No one ever had opposed him in any matter. And here he was admitting to us all that the staff's judgment was correct—he was a bully! This was the beginning of Tom's redemption.

Tom was saying, in effect: I am beginning to know what I am; it's the truth what he says. It's the truth that he will say about you when he begins to read again. Personally, I'm all mixed up and I don't know what to do about it. Nobody ever cares what I think anyhow. And that's why I and all of you say that we know it all and that we don't give a damn about anybody. The truth is we're hurt and we can't say it. I wish to God we could say it. I wish I could smash and smash until you all listen and listen until I'm talked out and all these guys are talked out.

That's what Tom was saying. That's what all these guys are saying practically all the time.

This meeting, it developed, was a crucial meeting for the club. Tom and Jerry and Chris slowly broke away from the main group. With them they took six or seven other members of the club and it was clear that a schism had been created in the membership. A few of those who pulled away with Tom gradually drifted away from the church and its activities. They were seen less and less, although we heard that they had either found jobs or had returned to school. We made no attempt to keep the club and its life intact. It would be better if the club were to break up altogether. We felt that it had served its purpose. That purpose in the main, was to

assist us in getting at those members of the Knights who were salvageable. This had meant, of course, that we had to endure the Knights, not for several months, but in fact for several years. It had meant undergoing a certain kind of crucifixion at their hands. Our task was to show love to them and to pray and hope that many would accept that love and return it. Some of the Knights were incapable of recognizing love when they encountered it and, therefore, could not return what they did not know. Others like Tom, Jerry, and Chris recognized this love, although they could not at first verbalize their experience. They had to recognize the inner dignity we saw in them, for until they could accept themselves, they could not accept anyone else.

Years later, Tom, onetime President of the Knights, came home from the army. He sat for a long time; he was deeply troubled. We could see that.

'You know,' he finally said, 'While I was in the army in Alabama, I went to see a psychiatrist. I wasn't making it and I knew that I had to get some help. I couldn't take orders from no one. I got so mad I didn't dare leave the base.

'He told me I was angry. He said I ought to get back to the Church where I could *accept white people*. He said the army was what I was taking my anger out on. He said I should get back home and go to the Church. You see, I told him all about the Mission.'

We all looked at each other and felt a little sick. 'Are we sheltering these people too much? Do we fail to prepare them for 'life' beyond Henry Street?

The Threatened Rumble

Early Monday afternoon, as I sat in the office, I knew that the club meeting that night would be crucial and that we would have to be prepared to meet trouble and deal with it. Word had already reached us through the grape vine that a club known as the Counts and another known as the Jaguars were about to do battle. The Knights were in tight with the Counts—they were brother clubs—and the Counts, a small club, had appealed to the Knights for help. A meeting between the clubs would surely end in a cutting or a burning or, at the very least, some broken heads. The Counts, we knew, had two or three pieces. The Jaguars were well armed. The Knights could borrow pieces from older brothers and clubs uptown.

Here was the old problem once again and the question was, knowing what we did, should we leave the entire matter with the police; and if this was to be our course, should we inform the Knights in advance. What would this do to our relations with them? If we did not take some decisive action how would this effect our role as priests with the club? These and questions like them constantly confront mission staffs. The answers of the mission staffs have often been misunderstood and misrepresented, even by people in high position.

We decided to do again what we had done many times before. We would inform the Youth Patrolmen of the affected police precincts of what we knew. We would explain again to the clubs involved that we had to do this. And then we would work our heads off in the attempt to prevent a fight. If we saw that it could not be prevented, we immediately would call the already alerted police. If we were successful in heading off the rumble, we still would call the Youth officers and rejoice with them.

Dinner at the Vicarage that night was hectic as usual. In addition to some guests seated at the table, numbers of parishioners came in to say hello or watch TV in the front room. There were no Knights around to take care of the telephone or door bell.

We were having our coffee when Tom showed up. Always ready to eat, tonight he refused coffee. We adjourned to the lounge in the basement.

Tom sat on the edge of the pool table. He was nervous, I could see that. Now and then, when I addressed an inconsequential question to him, he would look up for a moment. He knew that I was tensed up, too. (Somehow

I had to get over this feeling. Right then I wondered why I was there at all!)

Knowing that sometime I must plunge into the subject, I asked, 'What's happening, Tom?'

'Nothin much. Same old stuff, ya know,' he replied warily.

I became a little burned. 'Don't jive me, Tom. You know perfectly well what I mean.'

'What do you mean?' he said, pushing the cue ball toward the side pocket.

'Listen, man, you know that I know that the Jaguars are turning on the Counts. And you know that I know that the Knights and the Counts are tight. So that's the pitch, kid. Now talk to me.'

He stood on his feet and lit up. My God, he even used his own weeds! Then he looked at me for a long minute. 'Listen, Father, don't mess with this. *I say don't mess with this!*'

He walked to the door and, pausing, turned back toward me. 'I came to tell you that the boys won't be around for the meetin'. We gotta set uptown.' He walked through the door and was gone.

I sat quietly for five minutes. I knew that we had to get to Tom and the Pres of the Counts, to make contact with the Jaguars. And unless we worked fast, some kid would die. The police can't be everywhere, even when alerted.

I rushed upstairs to the office and telephoned Sande, one of our mission social workers, Father Bill, and Milt at the Settlement. 'Meet me in ten minutes at the church,' I said simply, but the tone of my voice was enough for them. They promised to be present.

We met in the back office of St. Augustine's. It was hot and Sande got an electric fan from the church. We immediately settled down to the tricky business of working out a strategy.

Milt was tensed up. He was not yet sure of his role with gang members in a fighting situation, and this was the first time he had worked with us. Father Bill, as usual, was calm. His first act was to take off his shoes and curl up in the ancient winged-back chair. Sande was optimistic. He was sure we could get to all the people. A forty-eight hour truce would be a good cooling off period, he felt. That would give us time to size up the situation and track down some of the rumors floating around. My own feelings at this point were anger and frustration at the brief interview with Tom.

Father Bill, scratching his chest, roared, 'What I want to know is where are all these settlements and so-called agencies. Where's Goodhue House? After all the Jaguars are their baby!' He glared at Milt as though Milt personified the community center movement. I explained that because of the holiday weekend, Goodhue House was closed.

Again he roared, 'If the centers would open to minorities, we wouldn't be saddled with this cussed mess all by ourselves.'

Father Bill's remark points up a problem which, for the sake of all of us involved in work of this sort, must somehow be aired. In the Mission situation on the Lower East Side, it is the Negroes and the Puerto Ricans who may be brought into our Church. They are not Roman Catholics in the main nor are they Jewish in religion. They come to our church in large numbers and, because

they do, we contribute to further segregation. We assist youth serving agencies in their sin of rejecting minorities out of fear of the problems which may arise with their white clientele—and even with their boards of trustees.

But what can we do? Turn them away in the interests of a partial integration? This we cannot, will not, do. They are souls for whom Christ yearns, and we are the Church. A parish is never a segregated parish because the people who are numbered as its members are souls. There are no white souls or brown souls. There are no Spanish-speaking souls. The so-called race problem is at bottom a theological problem. No one today seriously turns to anthropology, biology or psychology to defend a thesis of primary racial differentiation in the human species.

On the other hand, it would be stupid not to recognize that a problem exists. Christianity, if it is anything, is realistic about man. We know about those barriers which exist between man and man, between man and God. Among them is the barrier of color. In the United States the barrier is the color of a certain group of human beings—the descendants of African people brought here as slaves. Even in the South the laws of prejudice do not apply to the East Indian Ambassador who is dark brown. They would apply to the light-skinned Negro-American Ambassador to Liberia.

Any acceptance whatsoever of primary differentiation among the ethnic groupings of mankind surely is sinful. We do not, as Christians, deny the existence of sin and evil, parasitical though they may be. Nor do we deny our personal participation in sinful attitudes and acts. It is sin which has created the barrier between brown and white—sin with a long, violent history. When we

are honest and admit that on some levels we cannot break through to our brown brother or he to us, we must recognize in this situation nothing but sin, the work of the devil himself. But to say that because the problem of color is sin, it therefore must be accepted and lived with is to acknowledge defeat of God's purpose for the human race and triumph for the demonic powers.

The trouble with many youth serving agencies is that they look upon this problem as one of programming! Anyone will grant that in our present national situation it is easier to work with a single ethnic group. But our social scientists and community organizers are supposed to forge ahead along new paths which lead to greater social health for all our people. It is pitiful when a settlement house displays a symbolical Negro or two when the press is around taking pictures.

The Knights never felt at home in most of the youth serving agencies on the Lower East Side. Had they, who knows how much social sickness might have been avoided and how many cruel conflicts avoided? And both the Church and the settlements contributed to the sinning: the Church, because it is still struggling for perfect unity in Christ; and the settlements, because they lack of courage and vision. And both the Knights and their white counterparts suffered and do suffer to this day.

The Church in our Lower East Side situation can be an oasis for the Knights in the midst of a very angry desert land of hate and prejudice. But this may be a very dangerous development in the long run. The Church, therefore, must march out of the oasis into the enemy territory by irrigating the dry land—if I may strain a figure. But the implements used by the Church must be those of love and forgiveness. Otherwise, the

total of unreasoned hate is increased. Reunion of men comes only through love.

Nonetheless the judgment of God is upon those parishes which are not oases. God must be speaking in His righteous anger to such parishes even though through some rationalization they fail to hear His voice. Up and down our land, from one sea to the other, there are hundreds of church communities in which the sickness of ethnic hatred is overwhelmingly present. The Knights have been kept out of many a parish not because they are a tough social problem but because they are black. The guilt of a parish is a thousand-fold greater than that of a discriminatory community center. May God forgive such parishes for what they have done to the Toms and the Chrises, and Sues, and Berties.

The strategy meeting in the sweltering church office ended with a division of labor. Sande and I were to search for the Knights. Milt and Father Bill were to go after the Jaguars. We would meet at the church later, perhaps at about midnight.

Sande and I reached the corner of Rutgers and Monroe. Looking down Monroe, we spotted a group of our lads standing in front of the candy store. They were engaged in pushing and shoving each other—the usual corner horseplay.

As we approached them, Sande called out, 'What's happening?'

'Aw, nothin.'

'Hi, Father. Lo, Sande.'

'Been up at the church?'

A lot of parrying took place. Some shoving and pushing on the edges. Some coming and going. But in the

confusion it was apparent that the Knights had not yet determined on a course of action. There was to be a meeting of the officers of both clubs later that night. It now was even more important that we talk to the entire leadership.

Our experience has been that it almost always is the real leadership of a street club that must be reached if adult direction is to be accepted by the club. The structure of power in these groups is such that the decisions of the leadership are usually final. The rank and file membership of a street club ordinarily do not embark on any action—even one as simple as going to a movie together—unless the leadership approves.

It also should be kept in mind that Sande and I were not playing marbles. The results of this and later discussions were crucial in importance. It could be a life or death matter. It also should be remembered that none of the boys had as yet committed a criminal act, nor were any of them wanted by the police. It was with what might happen that we were concerned. And the degree of our success in heading off trouble always has been in direct relation to our closeness to the leaders and their trust and confidence in us.

To the inexperienced observer such a street corner conversation might appear a failure. There did not seem to be much interest in the conversation. Groups would drift away from the main body only to return to listen to what was being said. Sounding was greeted with hilarious laughter. One detected signs of nervousness in the group. One could get the feeling that these boys really wanted to be helped out of a tight spot. And yet they dreaded loss of face or the charge that they were 'chicken.'

I never yet have seen a club that really wanted to fight when the chips were down. These boys know the physical risk involved as well as the legal penalties they might have to pay. On the other hand, the code is so tight that no one will back away from a scrap any more than he would rat on fellow club members. The boys on the corner knew that we were concerned and, without putting it into words, they were glad that we were.

We returned to the church. Father Bill and Milt had talked with the Jaguars and had gotten word to the Counts that we were interested in what was going on. The meetings with the leadership were scheduled to take place at eleven-thirty P.M. at two different places.

We came together the next morning to put together the results of the talks with the Knights, the Counts, and the Jaguars. Apparently our call to the youth officers had paid off as we knew it would. The police had kept the clubs off base by continually breaking up groups collecting on corners. This harassment had gotten them nervous. We assured the boys that this was only the beginning. If there was a rumble and someone got hurt, there would be no peace for them for months. They would tire of being shoved around, patted down, afraid to visit their girls, afraid to go to dances as a group. The cops would be alert to pick them up at the slightest provocation. Furthermore, we informed them that the neighborhood was fed up with gang fighting. We told them of an impending community mass meeting at which neighbors would protest against such activity and make plans to stop it. Finally we managed to convince both sides to call it cool for forty-eight hours, at the end of which a mediation meeting would be held. We all could breathe easier—although a cooling off period is just

enough time for some sick hothead to kick over the traces and undo all the work.

In a city like New York street clubs have one or several brother clubs. The Knights, for example, had brother clubs living as far away as the Bronx. Our knowledge of the alliances in which the three groups were involved led us to estimate that over a thousand boys might be drawn into the fighting. The entire group would not, of course, converge on the Lower East Side. Instead, a brother club of the Jaguars in the Bronx might attack a brother club of the Knights in the same borough. Or a club from Brooklyn might invade central Harlem. And so it would go. In addition, the bopping might extend to ethnic warfare. The Jaguars were mainly white with a few Puerto Rican members. The Knights were Negro.

Our main source of knowledge with respect to gangs out of the neighborhood was, and is, the New York City Youth Board. The Youth Board is an official social service agency of the city. It was organized a number of years ago to cope with the manifold problems of youth in the city. It worked directly with them and it also assisted voluntary agencies on a contract basis. Perhaps the most revolutionary approach of the Youth Board to conflict groups is the so-called unattached group workers' program. This program, after having gone through an experimental stage, calls for the sending out into a neighborhood, selected for its high incidence of delinquency, a highly trained unit of group workers. It is the unit's task to establish relationships with the conflict groups of the area. In order to accomplish this the unit acquaints itself with the neighborhood and its characteristics, with

the existing social agencies, the degree of general community organization, as well as with the various power groups in the teenage population. The individual worker then must win the confidence of club relationship as well as rank and file membership. In order to do this he must quite literally 'live' with the gang. He must frequent their hangouts, do what they do and go where they go. The only exception is, of course, that he will not knowingly break the law with them. He squares himself at the outset by informing them that he also must act as a responsible citizen should he learn that they are about to break the law or threaten the peace of the community.

It must be underscored that the Youth Board is interested chiefly in preventing youngsters from committing unlawful acts. Its approach is that of sound social service. It is a mediating, rehabilitating, healing approach to the conflict group. It is concerned with the resolution of tensions among groups, and it offers individual treatment services either directly or through referral. The Board seeks not only involvement in the lives of our troubled children but also understanding of the reasons why they become troubled. When working with a street gang, therefore, it takes into consideration such factors as environment, ethnic background, educational facilities and the existence of immediately appropriable social and recreational opportunities. Through years of experience under excellent leadership, it has developed into a highly organized and extensive agency attempting, with intelligence and imagination, to cope with all the facets of delinquency problems. The city should be grateful to this dedicated and courageous group of men and women as day after day they seek to alleviate the physical and emotional pain of thousands of our children.

The general approach of the Police Department, on the other hand, is a punitive one. It seeks to solve the problem of delinquency through the application of more force. It would appear that its philosophy for meeting the problem of delinquency has two cardinal principles: arrest as many as possible of our troubled children and then 'put them away.' This judgment refers principally to the precinct level of police activity, of course. Other approaches of the Department, such as that of the Juvenile Aid Bureau, resemble more that of the Youth Board.

In New York these two ideologies must frequently clash. The Police Department exists to maintain the peace of the community. It is clear that some situations do arise among our youth which are so explosive that the police must become directly involved. It always has been our policy at the Mission to call for police help when such a condition exists. The police always have responded with alacrity and efficiency. Nonetheless, there is great need for those representing these two fundamentally different ideologies to engage in continuous communication and discussion with each other and with other youth-serving agencies in the city. It would appear that in a 'fallen world' there is need for both approaches, providing they share a common objective: the healing of our thousands of sick young people.

CHAPTER XII

The Truce

The Knights, the Counts, and the Jaguars together in one room! The Youth Board workers sitting in on the meeting had patted down each boy carefully before permitting him to enter the conference room. No one was packing, but it was better to play it cool.

We had asked a highly placed official in the city government to act as the mediator. He had been briefed carefully both as to the facts as we knew them and as to the meaning of 'bop' words and expressions. He sat at the end of a long table. The Knights and the Counts sat on one side of the table, the Jaguars on the other. Behind both groups of boys sat members of the Youth Board, a few social workers and priests.

The mediator began the meeting with a short speech

reviewing the reasons why we had gathered. He proposed that, as a basis for procedure, each side speak in turn, beginning with the Counts. He then asked who was empowered to speak for the two groups. Tom was designated as spokesman for the Knights and the Counts; Pablo for the Jaguars.

Tom began with a recital of the grievances of his club against the Jaguars. The trouble began, he asserted, when Tino was dumped by four Jaguars as he walked down Rivington Street two weeks before. This had led Tino to challenge a single Jaguar to a fair one. But before the fair one could take place the Jaguars had invaded the Knights' turf several times and had passed the word that Tino was going to get burned. To make matters worse, Tom declared that a group of Jaguar toms had torn the clothes off a Count's old lady and had carved the letter 'J' on her arm with a knife. It was a rather impressive list of gripes.

Pablo angrily denied Tom's accusations. He said that Tom had twisted the facts to suit his own purposes. Could he prove, for example, that the cats who had dumped Tino really were Jaguars. He, the War Councilor, knew nothing about it. Furthermore, on the night of the fair one, it was well known that the Knights had hidden their people on every roof top of the block in which the fight was to take place. No Jaguar had been in Knights' turf; the only time they had seen the Knights was at the church, where no bopping was supposed to take place. He had never heard of any broad getting cut up.

As soon as Pablo had finished there were cries of denial and accusation. The atmosphere was tense and uncertain. It was only with difficulty that the mediator re-

stored order. Adults in back of the agitated boys spoke quietly to individuals. After a hectic few minutes it was quiet and the mediator, in a calm, low voice, began to talk about 'rumors.' Had anyone *seen* the girl's arm? Where had the story come from? He told about the rumor in the Bronx a few months ago to the effect that two Chanticleers had cut off the left breast of the girl who went with a demon. On the day it allegedly happened that girl was in Trenton visiting her aunt. Returning to the matter of the arm he pressed the question, had anyone actually seen the girl? What was her name? Whose girl was she anyhow? There was silence at the table. Someone muttered, 'Well, that's what we heard.' The boys got the point.

The mediator then went on to the question of the accurate identification of club members. Did each club know exactly who belonged to the club of the rival? He carefully questioned Tino about the four who had dumped him on Rivington. What did they look like? Had he ever seen them before? Which one had hit him first? He drew out of Tino the fact that he knew only one of the four to be a Jaguar. Pressed for the name, Tino reluctantly said, 'Capro.' Now Capro, a bona fide Jaguar, was present at the table. He arose in hot anger and denied ever having laid a hand upon Tino. He stated that he was uptown on the night it happened. He couldn't have done it. Suddenly Pablo savagely silenced him and asked if the Jaguars could retire to the end of the room for a conference. This was granted and, at the suggestion of the mediator, cokes were passed out.

We singled out Tom and told him that he should be prepared to give in a point. It was obvious, we said, that Capro had been the prime instigator in the dumping

of Tino. But Capro was a hothead. He had never spoken for the Jaguars. And now the question should be raised relative to clubs permitting hotheads to speak for them. On the Knights' side, we suggested, wasn't it almost always Tino who got the entire club into trouble? Tom agreed to adopt this as his strategy when the Jaguars returned.

Soon Pablo announced that he was ready to resume the discussion. He would not admit that Capro had dumped Tino. But the refusal was put in a manner that led us to see that the club could not desert one of its members in a show down. This, as we all knew, was an inviolable rule in the gang code. It also was a question of face-saving.

It was then that Tom raised the question of the role of hotheads in the clubs. No one guy, he asserted, had the right to call it on with another club. If everything was cool between two clubs and a hothead caused trouble on his own, it was the duty of that club to discipline its own member. If he repeated this kind of behavior perhaps the club should throw him out. Pablo readily agreed but added that such a radical step should be ratified by the whole membership of the club. Meanwhile both Tino and Capro sulked.

The mediator then asked what could be done about violation of turf. Both sides denied ever having entered the other's turf in large numbers. The mediator said that he was not interested in whether or not there had been violations; he wanted to know about future plans. Pablo suggested that not more than three members of either club ever move as a group through alien turf. This was accepted by Tom although, he added, it would

be difficult because several of the Knights' women lived in Jaguar turf.

The mediator at this point began to sum up agreements. He asked one of the adults to take them down as he went along. It had been agreed, he began, that rumors were different from facts. Each group, he counseled, should investigate everything it heard before taking hasty action. Second, no group should jump to conclusions before it was ascertained just who was involved in a given situation. Third, only the whole membership of a club could decide that it was 'on' with another club. Fourth, the clubs would not enter each other's turf in groups of more than three.

The problem now, he added, was one of machinery for enforcement. It was agreed that if a problem arose the Pres of either club would take the matter to one of the priests of the Mission. No matter how hot the issue might be, the Pres of either club would be assured of safe conduct through alien turf. The mediator then offered the suggestion that this truce remain in force for a month, at the end of which a second meeting would be held. This proposal also was accepted by the spokesmen.

It was here that Pablo, rising to his feet, stated that none of the agreements would last unless 'we get to know each other in the heart!' It was a moving speech. It was a fitting climax for the meeting. And it led to Tom's proposal that both groups adjourn to the favorite pizza place on Stanton Street.

After the boys left, the mediator and the rest of us remained to discuss the mediation. We were proud of our street boys. The meeting confirmed our feeling that,

given a chance, they could work out their problems together. But they needed help—the kind of help that concerned people could give them. They needed places to go, ‘a place of their own,’ trained counselling. If only we had enough common sense to see that the ‘youth problem’ cannot be solved by adding more thousands of police but rather by adding to the pitifully small number of really concerned clergy and social workers. The answer to the problem is not more and bigger reformatories but youth hostels, expertly manned, and recreational centers in which the word *re-create* is understood. The answer is, quite frankly, in more concern for the spiritual destiny of our troubled children.

In a way, there are four approaches to this problem: through education, through social services of all kinds, through preventive police action, and through the Church. Those who represent these approaches have seldom gotten together. Facing this fact as a minister of religion gives rise to the following observations.

There exists a chasm between the Church and professional social work. The Church has felt, and often rightly, that the social sciences tend to treat persons as cases and to ignore that part of man’s life which has to do—in Tillich’s phrase—with his ‘ultimate concern.’ On the other hand, many social workers are critical of the Church because of its frequently sentimental and bungling way of trying to help people who are in trouble. Sometimes they have charged that the Church was interested only in ‘the soul’ to the exclusion of the here-and-now life situation of people. In truth, there has been far too little real communication between the Church and social work.

The police approach often has had the approval of highly-placed churchmen. Frequently there are alliances between the police and the Church, probably because both feel sympathetic toward each other as protectors of the structure of society. Sometimes, however, open warfare between parishes and the police has erupted. Usually the cause for such friction is alleged police brutality or racial discrimination. And sometimes the parish has had to fight this battle without the aid of social workers. But, increasingly these days, the Church and social work band together over matters of social and civic concern.

Our schools frequently insulate themselves from the street. If there is no problem in the school, it often is assumed that there is no problem in the street. One has the feeling that racial integration, for example, is viewed by many educators on the local level in a shallow and indeed naive fashion. Integration is not realized simply by having Negro, white, and Spanish American children sitting together in the same class room, or standing together in the auditorium to pledge allegiance to the flag. The depth of our ethnic divisions probably are felt most keenly in those border states where school integration is a new thing. But in the North racial tension is often the cause for the rise of conflict groups among young people. Surely our educators should be aware of what their students do after three in the afternoon.

There is a crying need for the Church, social institutions, the school and the law enforcement agencies to talk to each other *in depth*. Out of such continuing conversation there surely would grow a common confrontation of the 'youth problem.' The right hand would know

what the left was doing. The Knights and the Jaguars would become the concern of everyone instead of just a few.

This much is sure, whenever the community as a whole bands together to meet the problem some solutions are reached. The 'gang' is the problem of the community. The neighborhood must search out its causes and seek to eradicate them. The modern city cannot 'leave it to the social workers or the police,' as someone wrote a short time ago. The gang is made up of *our children*. Every pre-delinquent or delinquent is our child. And they number hundreds of thousands throughout the land.

CHAPTER XIII

The Way of Meeting

When I look back upon our experience with the Knights, it seems to me that, in the main, we did the right thing with them. Of course, we made many, many, many mistakes; but at least the lines of communication were kept open. They still are open, after a fashion, with all of the members of the club. Even those who have been in and out of Riverside Hospital for treatment as drug addicts have retained a relationship with us. I remember the first night Tino escaped from the hospital. He appeared at the Vicarage with Pablo, a Puerto Rican lad whom he had befriended at the hospital. I looked at him and said, 'Tino, do you want me to call the hospital and tell them that you're coming back?' He nodded his assent. I asked him, 'Shall I tell them that I am bringing you

back?' Again he nodded his assent. And I called the hospital and informed the authorities that I was returning Tino to them.

At least he came back to the church. It was the only place to which he knew he could go. A house of hospitality—a Christian house of hospitality—that must seem strange to many. Not often in this present account have I used the name of God or of our Lord, but I fervently hope our Lord stands behind the actions which have taken place. The revelation of the love of God to a person does not come always by the usual, holy means of grace. I am reminded of the words of Bernanos' dying priest. 'What does it matter, grace is everywhere.'

If the parish, that miniature Body of Christ, is to be a haven for all who seek entrance, then there must be no exceptions made. Everyone, especially the sinner, is welcomed to its board. And the poor are always the honored guests. The social and racial outcast is here a king and a priest, in Peter's words. Only occasionally there comes to the church a person who is so filled with anger and hostility that he becomes a disruptive and dangerous element in the life of the holy group, and he has been a source of untold anguish and soul-searching to the members of our staff. On one or two occasions we have reluctantly decided that for the sake of the group such a person must be discouraged from coming.

One possible definition for a parish is that it is God's way of meeting the problems of the unloved. This meeting between God and the unloved, the unwanted, takes place in the preaching of the Word, in the Sacraments, in the social life of the parish made possible by the climate of acceptance which is engendered by those who have been baptized and confirmed in the Catholic faith.

One of the main tasks of the parish priest is to train the militant core of his parishioners in such a way that they understand as fully as possible the true nature of a Christian parish. While the priests of a parish constitute the hard core of the Christian community, the role of the laity in the creation of this climate of acceptance cannot be minimized in any respect. The clergy and the laity together constitute the Church. A priest may wish to receive the outcast and the sinner, but he cannot do so unless he has the militant core of his parish on his side. The major task, then, is to train and indoctrinate the militants. This in itself is a long, arduous, and frequently a heartbreaking task. But without the militants, his inner community of the concerned, the priest can do nothing. The Knights would have been cast out.

An example of this was when the question arose as to what the parish should do with those youngsters who had returned from treatment for narcotic addiction. Anyone who knows about drugs is certain that one of the most critical phases in the rehabilitation of the drug addict is the manner in which he is received once he has returned from hospitalization. If he is rejected by the community, the chances are much greater that he soon will return to the use of narcotics. On the other hand, if the community makes every effort to receive him and in this manner to continue his rehabilitation, this chance is minimized, although it is not eradicated. Many parishes in metropolitan areas have consciously or unconsciously refused to accept such unfortunate individuals back into their life. The reason for this is, of course, the fear that the returned patient may infect other young people in the congregation. It must be obvious that here a priest cannot make a unilateral decision. We were fully aware

of this and took the matter to our militants. We invited members of the staff of the hospital for the treatment of narcotics to address the militants and the Chapel Council. In addition to this we presented our own point of view, as priests. The result was a decision on the part of all of us to do everything humanly possible to receive back into our community those who had become addicted to drugs. On the other hand, we determined to take every safeguard against the spread of this dread infection. A few of our youngsters who had not accepted hospitalization and who were 'hooked,' i.e. addicted to the use of heroin, we felt must be barred from certain activities. This feeling was shared also by the majority of the young people who were their peers. For example, the older teenage lounge committee voted to permit three or four drug addicts to attend the weekly lounge program as long as these young men promised that they would not attempt to use drugs on the premises. On the other hand the staff decided to prohibit these youngsters from using the Vicarage freely because it had been established that some of them had been using one of the bathrooms as a place in which to take drugs. All of these actions were fully explained to the unfortunate addicts, and they accepted them freely.

One young man whom we felt was a user of drugs, and also a purveyor or 'pusher' of them, we barred permanently from the church buildings. However, it should be again emphasized that such drastic action was, and is, taken by us only as a last resort. One of the continuing tasks of the staff of our Mission is that of explaining to the 'decent' people of our neighborhood the meaning of our attitude toward sinners and those afflicted with such habits as drugs. We have been accused from time

to time of being a haven for mobsters, dope addicts, alcoholics and bums. Some of our neighbors have refused to send their children even to Sunday School because of this. Here, again, the militant core has been of inestimable value to us as members of the staff. They, along with us, have attempted to interpret our attitude to our neighbors—and with some degree of success.

A LETTER FROM LAVO

Some boys make the grade—at least we pray that they have—but it takes time. Lavo is one of these. He has written a letter which says more than I could ever say.

. . . and it was when we and the Robins got together that this dope business started. A little while after we all got a little more friendly did we get introduced to heroin.

A member of the club whom I will call by the name of Spain had known one of the Robins' boys pretty well, a fellow I call Peppy. Now it seems as if Spain had got himself a job and was in possession of a few keys, of which one was to the entrance of a basement near the Church. Now this is how it all came about.

One evening a few boys and girls including Spain and myself were sitting around in front of the Vicarage just killing time. Peppy approached from across by the candy store and he beckoned to Spain who went over to see what he wanted. I watched them as they talked but I had no idea what they were talking about. They went down into the basement and, after a few minutes, curiosity got the better of me and I followed. I knocked softly on the door and whistled to assure them that I was of no authority.

Spain opened the door and told me to hurry in. I did so and when I entered I saw for the first time in my life a drug addict injecting heroin into his blood stream.

The sight almost made me sick on the stomach—watching him inject blood back and forth like it wasn't his. And when he finished the look on his face was horrifying. His eyes were up in his head. He turned very pale. Its hard to explain how a guy looks after a shot of smack. The sight almost made me sick on the stomach again. You just got to see for yourself.

And then he gave Spain a shot, but it wasn't in his vein. It was what we call a skin-pop. I almost cried watching Spain take a dose of smack. I thought he would surely die. It was his first time and I had heard so much about drugs and overdoses. I really was afraid for him especially when he started throwing up and lying on the stoop. No one but me knew that he was high.

You wouldn't think that after watching the effects of Spain's first shot that I would ever touch that stuff, would you? Neither did I but underneath all of the fear and disgust I felt, the next day I took my first shot. Peppy came around the next night at the same time, for the same favor—this time in return for the use of the basement. Peppy gave Spain a whole bag of smack and also a set of works—a syringe and needle. Spain in turn called me and we scurried into the basement to get this killer ourselves. Now when I had got the dope in my body I had just realize what I was doing. I could have died on the spot and this bothered me more than

the strange effects the dope had on me. But even the next day I wanted a little more just to see if it felt the same way. Someone told the first time you always get sick, but after is when the kicks come in.

To make an obvious story short, we kept trying it until it no longer made us sick. It made us feel good. It is a very odd kind of feeling. You feel superior, wealthy, secure; you feel as though there is no future, no past—just now. But for someone who has never had this feeling he would never guess that the fellow nodding and dribbling and scratching, looking miserable, could by any chance feel good. Instead he would think that the fellow wouldn't make it through the night without the doctor's help. But the only doctor he needs to see is the dope pusher, and quick.

Not having any money to keep buying dope for ourselves we started telling our friends about it and they in turn underwent the sickness of their first shot and pretty soon we were all well on the way to becoming dope addicts. At first we only were using dope before going to a dance or to Coney Island or whatever we were taking part in as a group. It was just for kicks, to build up our nerve and such things as that. I don't think we knew what 'hooked' was. But as days, months and then years flew by, then that's when not only we but Father Myers and quite a few people knew that we had went out for kicks in the wrong fashion. It wasn't for kicks anymore; we were hooked.

Spain and I sought help from Father Myers who has offered it to us before we were hooked. I wish I would have taken Father Myers' help when I first

started using drugs. At any rate Spain and I were under advice from Father Myers and other persons to commit ourselves to Riverside Hospital on North Brothers Island in the Bronx. It was for treatment for drugs. We committed together in February, 1955. Spain stayed two months and I remained for five months.

I thought after five months without dope I would be free of it at last when I was released. July, 1955, I came home. I felt brand new like a young boy my age should feel: athletic, ambitious. But there was something missing. There were my friends still using dope. They were looking pretty bad, skinny, ragged. I didn't want this anymore but I was lonely. I wanted to have fun and enjoy coming home, but there were none of my friends out there who weren't using drugs. Those who weren't didn't associate with us. No one accepted me as myself, the boy who was cured, who went away to get another chance. The girls gave me the cold shoulder and the dull 'hello'. They all thought I was still a dope addict and probably had been in jail.

But there was one crowd I got a big welcome from and that was Spain and the old gang, all doped up. I hope you believe me, I almost cried. Only after five hours of being home, after five months of treatment, I took another shot. I really didn't want it, but I needed something to hold back my tears. I had just seen when I got home what dope did to me before I left. I lost all respect from my girl friends. All my friends who were really friends I lost. All I could get from anybody was pity. So I

went back to my habits and three months later I was arrested and sent back to Riverside.

Another five months, and when I came out the same problems. Three months later, violation of probation and back to Riverside. Seven months later home again, really home. I have at last been cured. When Father Myers got this story from me I had not touched dope in five weeks. However, not to deceive the public, when I first came home, I got drugged a few times. I had to, to prove to myself I didn't need dope anymore.

Well, most of the Knights Club is split up now that we are a little older. Some are doing very well, some not too good but happy. Some are still using drugs and going to and from Riverside Hospital.

Myself? well between trying to stay away from drugs, I am trying to make my dreams of someday being a comedian come true. There is nothing in this world I want more than to entertain. Even now Father Myers is still trying to help me make this dream a reality.

This is as true a story as I can give you of some of the things that happened during the era of the Knights. I hope I have been able to express myself in this story. I really want you to understand what broke up the little community Father Myers wanted so badly to build bigger and stronger in the Christian way of life.

Our attitude toward the 'unregenerate' has frequently brought us into conflict with social agencies in our community. It is the practice of many community centers to

oust youngsters who seem to be unmanageable and who are threats to the structure of the program. Very frequently when trouble arises at a dance or at some other social activity, the authorities of many of these community centers do not hesitate to call the police for help. It has been our practice to call the police only as a last desperate measure.

Usually our staff members have been able to control the youngsters who come to our parish houses. Recently some of the staff held a meeting with the youth directors of two settlement houses, concerning three boys who were considered to be a menace to the community. The sharp differences between our two philosophies emerged. The settlement house workers desired to bar these three youngsters not only from their houses but also from every other social or church agency in the community. It was their hope that this would lead these three youngsters into unlawful activity and that the police would then pick them up! The problem, then, of ridding the community of the boys would be solved by court action. It happened that two of these youngsters were attached to St. Christopher's Chapel of our Mission. One of them lived for a time in a vacant room at the Chapel. The other was the son of one of our most faithful and devoted women workers. The principal charge leveled against the three boys by the settlement house workers was that they disrupted program within their respective houses whenever they appeared. They also suspected that these boys were leaders of some gang activities in the neighborhood of the nearby housing project, and that they might be participating in a shake-down racket of younger school children.

Because of our close relationship with the boys we felt

that the issue was not quite so clear as the social workers made it out to be. We therefore argued that the boys should be given another chance, and that all of us might well cooperate in endeavouring to rehabilitate them. While the exact words were not used, it was clear to us that we were considered to be neophytes in this type of work.

I hope that I will not be misunderstood when I refer again to that certain *plus* which is present in our approach to people. It should be said that we are willing to learn everything we can from social workers and that we have adopted a great many of their proven techniques. We feel strongly that the rift existing between the Church and social agencies ought to be removed as speedily as possible. But we also feel that the Church, working honestly and conscientiously in a neighborhood such as ours, has much to teach the social worker. In the course of our discussion we pointed out to them the practically non-existent vandalism in our Church properties and the absence of thievery in workshops, dark rooms and in other craft activities. We reminded them of the sacramental relationship which often exists between priest and teenager. We discussed with them our ideas concerning the *climate of acceptance* which must exist if there is to be a positive relationship between staff and young people. We further told them of our belief that those who work with the young people of our neighborhood should live in that neighborhood and should identify themselves as much as possible with the life of the people who live there.

I report this discussion in order to illustrate some of the differences which exist between our approach as a Christian mission and the approach of the secular com-

munity center. Many of us feel that the settlement house or community center must rethink its strategy and approach to people living in a depressed area. It further seems to many of us that the older settlement house idea, in which the principal staff members lived in the house, was superior to the present arrangement by which most of the staff members live in neighborhoods far removed from the one served by the center. One thinks, for example, of Miss Helen Hall, the director of the Henry Street Settlement House, who lives in the settlement house and, therefore, can speak of her neighbors with a high degree of reality. The Henry Street Settlement House still preserves this older idea of the settlement house and its role in the community. It is difficult to see how social workers can in any way identify themselves with the community in which they work if some physical proximity to that community is not involved.

Of course, it is easy to use the word 'identification' without realizing that to *identify* in any real sense with the people in one's parish is a most difficult and continuing task. All of the educational and cultural differences between priest and people remain. It would not be realistic for the priest or the staff member of a mission such as ours to believe that he can jump out of his skin. Furthermore, his 'differences' may bring a contribution badly needed in areas such as ours. On the other hand, one must identify as much as possible both physically and spiritually with his people. This means, among other things, that the priest will not live on a scale far above that of his average parishioner; that he will live in the heart of his parish and not away from it. And surely his home will be open to his 'children,' his sons and daughters in the Lord. The priest will soon discover that such

a close relationship with his parishioners can be most rewarding and wonderful. He will discover that in our day and age there are desires for cultural and educational advancement deeply inbedded in the minds and aspirations of his people. And his unique and often coveted vantage point will enable him to draw them out and to stimulate them to further exploration in these areas.

There is another basic difference which frequently exists between the so-called Church and social agency approach. This has to do with the evaluation of the leadership potential in a community which contains, in the main, low income folk. It has been a large part of our philosophy to encourage grass-roots leadership in our congregations. During the years we have noticed the growing leadership group among our people with extreme gratification. We have encouraged this in every way and can say confidently that the type of leadership existing in our congregations is excelled by none anywhere. On the other hand, many of the settlement houses feel that the leadership in the community must be in the professionally trained category. There is a tendency for them to believe that such cannot be found among the masses of the people. This we believe is a fundamental heresy both from the Christian and the democratic point of view. It is not necessary, we believe, to import via housing or any other way, so-called middle class families in order to find leadership in the community. That potential for leadership already exists in our community and in others like it. It must be sought out, cultivated, and trained by the Church or by the social agency. No community will change because social workers want it to change. Leadership ability exists among the masses of the people ready and eager to be tapped. When one

grows impatient and anxious to get things under way, he must remember that among minority groups in our country there has been no opportunity given for leadership—or very little of it indeed.

If it can be said that there is a cornerstone in the work of the Urban Priests' Group, certainly part of it is our desire to develop local leadership in our parishes. In the Lower East Side Mission of Trinity Parish we have bent every effort to encourage the acceptance of leadership responsibility. Furthermore, it has been our conviction that group leadership is superior to individual leadership. We, therefore, have striven to develop real group life and group awareness among our people in the hope that out of this would emerge a real group leadership. While this does not prevent the individual from using his talents in the parish, it does mean that the base of leadership will be much more solid and broad. In order to cultivate such group leadership we have turned, first of all, to our teenager. With the able assistance of the School of Education of New York University we have, over the years, developed a group leadership training program which has the effect of providing us with an ever increasing number of youth leaders in our Mission. Many of these young people once were members of the Knights and other cliques. Now they have begun to take a deep interest in their parish community and in the affairs of the community at large. We know that the future leadership of our Mission will depend largely upon these young people. They will be the ones who, in the long run, will carry forward the cause of our Lord in this neighborhood.

There was, for example, a lad named John Stone. He was a member of the Knights when first we came to

know him. While he had been brought up in the Church and had been a student in the church school, he soon began to identify more and more with the social club and its activities. Like so many others, when he reached the age of sixteen he quit school, and after a few abortive attempts to get a job began a life of loafing. We could see him disintegrating before our eyes. He was an extremely intelligent lad and although he agreed with everything we said, still did nothing to get himself out of the rut. Then one night he, together with two of his friends, committed a robbery. Over a hundred dollars were stolen, and before the night was over John and his friends were in the custody of the police.

We went to court with them and explained to the Judge that we were not interested in getting them 'off the hook,' but rather in helping them in any way possible. Since this was John's first offense the Judge released him on probation and instructed us to do whatever we could in the way of getting him to a psychiatrist. This we did, but as the months dragged by we could see very little, if any, improvement. Finally, all that had been happening inside the boy as a result of his talks with the psychiatrist and with the clergy seemed to come to a head. A job opportunity opened. He took it and kept the position for almost a year. We felt this to be a major miracle in John's life, and indeed it was a most significant turning point. At this time the group leadership training program began in the Mission and John became a part of it. John is one of the assistant leaders of the training program, has returned to night school and is holding down a job. This brief account of John leaves out all of the many things which happened during the months and years of his rehabilitation. There

were many hours of talk with him, often at odd moments. There was the surrounding of him with our love and concern. There were the many moments of rejection by him of us. Nothing has been said of the countless numbers of times when John slipped back into his old ways. But it all came about by God's good grace, and we have high hopes that John, once an active Knight, will take his place as a leader in our parish and in our neighborhood.

John was met where he was by people who lived where he lived—and the meeting bore good fruit.

The Ambassadors

The 'apostolate to the gangs,' like the mission to the Moslems, results in relatively few conversions. The Knights came to us when their behavior patterns were rather well fixed. They came as a bopping group, and it was difficult for them to change their ways. What had to happen was the destruction of the group as such. Only then could individuals within the group work towards good citizenship. And it was necessary for the leaders within the club to make the initial break. After that the weaker could join in the exodus.

It was different with the Ambassadors. This group became a club, a friendship group, only after we had had them as church school students, as confirmands, as altar boys. They had been around for years, and we

knew them and their families well, before they organized into a 'church club.' We had had a measure of control over their lives during the crucially formative years.

We knew the boys who eventually became the Ambassadors when they were eight and nine years old. At that time one of the clergy, sensing their need 'to belong' even at that early age, organized them into what was known as St. Joseph's Boys' Club. They met once a week for recreation in the chapel hall. At the same time they were members of the church school and some of them were learning to serve at the altar. Each summer they attended the camp conducted by Trinity Parish. To make it even better many of their parents were communicants of the Church.

As they got older it seemed necessary to organize them into a social club under the leadership of a devoted and skilled parishioner. Each week they would go on an 'adventure,' i.e. visit a museum, take a ride on the Staten Island Ferry, or perhaps go roller skating. They held regular meetings conducted by elected officers. They organized money raising affairs in order to buy club jackets. It was then that they selected the name 'Ambassadors.' We pointed to them with pride as an example of a 'good club.' We still do because the Ambassadors have remained to this day a decent club under church auspices.

There have been periods of strain, however. When gang activity began to accelerate, there was tremendous pressure upon the club to turn into a bopping group. Gangs on all sides attempted to persuade them to become a brother club. The Ambassadors resisted all of these overtures and continued to be interested in their singing group, in sports, in socializing, and in their club room

in the church tower. They were faithful, too, in attendance at The Holy Communion. Several of them were assistant church school teachers. Other groups of their age began to look upon them with envy and even to copy their non-bopping ways. Only recently the leader of a new group of Spanish-speaking boys, when seeking entrance into the church program for his boys, affirmed that his group wanted 'to be like the Ambassadors.'

One night a parents' committee of the Lower East Side Neighborhoods Association sponsored a dance at the Henry Street Settlement. Toward the end of the affair we noticed small clusters of boys earnestly talking in the middle of the floor. There were Spiders, Corsairs, Yukons—and Ambassadors—among them. The staff began to circulate, and soon we had the story.

Apparently one of the Ambassadors had been flirting with bopping groups. The officers of the club stated, with obvious disgust, that he wanted 'to be a be-bop' and that they would have to 'do something about him.' They said that he had been sounded by one of the Spiders and had invited them to 'go home and get their stuff.' This worried us because the Spiders were known to have plenty of stuff. With pieces in their hands, they could do all kinds of damage. We alerted the Youth Board and called the Police Station.

Just at that point the officers of the Spiders walked into the hall with overcoats on. Their hands were in their pockets. There was not much time to lose before the dance ended and several hundred teenagers poured out into the street. It was on the street that any burning would take place.

Hurriedly the Youth Board and mission staff went into

a strategy huddle. I was to corral the Ambassadors into an office and not let them out until the Spiders had moved along. The Youth Board was to urge the leadership of the Spiders to keep their people moving out of the area.

Reluctantly the Ambassadors followed me to the upstairs office. They did not want anyone to think they were chickening out of a tough spot. I had to use all my persuasive powers to get them to move at all.

Once inside the room I asked them to tell me the whole story. They knew that here was a situation in which one foolhardy member had led the whole club to the edge of serious trouble. There was no need for me to go into the destructive history of the Spiders. We all agreed that the Ambassadors had three possible courses of action: they could chicken out—which I knew none of them wanted to do; they could ‘declare it on’ with Spiders—a foolhardy decision in view of the age and size of the Spiders’ club and the elaborate way in which they were thought to be armed with weapons; or they could face the Pres of the Spiders and tell him emphatically that they were a social club and that they would have no part of bopping. Also they must tell him that no one member of the club had the right to commit the membership to any course of action.

I left them for a few moments to talk things over. When I returned, the Pres informed me that the club wanted to talk to Rocko, the Pres of the Spiders. He asked me to bring Rocko to the office as soon as possible.

Quickly I went out into the street and found Rocko talking to Youth Board workers down the block. He returned with me to the office.

'You all know Rocko,' I said. Members of the club nodded their heads.

'Do you want to talk to him?' I asked the Pres of the Ambassadors.

'Rocko,' said the Pres, 'my people are a social club. We don't bop. We come to the church and have fun.'

The Secretary of the club added, 'And no member of our club speaks for all of us. We just heard about this tonight.'

Rocko, slick, smooth, the veritable stereotype of a gang leader, looked around the room for a moment.

'O.K.,' he said. 'That's the pitch. I'll tell my boys. See ya around.'

With that he walked out of the room.

The Ambassadors heaved a collective sigh of relief.

They then walked across the street with me en route to their club room where, as the Pres informed me, they would take care of the trouble maker 'in executive session.'

It is difficult for a group of kids in a 'high delinquency area' to keep from being sucked into the gang pattern. It can be done, and it is to the everlasting credit of the Ambassadors that they proved that it can be done. The club probably could not have stayed out of things, however, had the Church not been the most important part of its life for several years.

The job of the Church vis-à-vis teenagers in a neighborhood like this is threefold. Efforts must be made to break up gangs. Groups of youngsters must be helped in their efforts to stay away from involvement with gangs. And the Church should seek to preserve in groups those positive reasons why youngsters group together in the

first place. The gang ethic is not baptizable *in toto*; it is in part. But if a parish attempts any one or more of these courses of action it must know what it is doing and be prepared to take all the risks. It must be willing to get down into the life of the community, no matter how far removed its standards are from those approved in the middle class. It is fatal for both parish and neighborhood to make a start and then give up in despair. If the Church is to be the Church in the *inner city*, it must, in Auden's words, 'go native in everything save in faith and morals.'

Some of us are willing to suggest that in many cases the standards of people living in the inner city are more genuine and honest than those exalted in the more normal neighborhood.

CHAPTER XV

The House of Hospitality

There is need for a fresh and daring look at the meaning of 'parish.' Whatever the final results of such an honest attempt may be, the parish must be so defined in action that it includes the Knights and their kind. If they are not included, what remains is a society of Those Pleased With Themselves—the group which has insulated itself from the dangers of society and which has thereby opened itself to the most insidious attacks of the devil.

Our Mission, because of its geographical location in the Lower East Side, and because minority groups feel at home in it, has become a center toward which hostile, angry groups move. Many social agencies are afraid to include them in their program. Many youth and

community houses are fearful lest their 'positive' children leave the program with the advent of large numbers of troublemakers. Most churches with youth programs feel the same way. There is much to be said for this point of view and it ought not to be lightly dismissed. Few agencies have the staff, the space, or even the understanding of boards of trustees, to embark on such a course of action in the community as potentially dangerous as this. And these agencies bear a heavy responsibility toward the vast majority of young people who are not anti-social in their behavior.

It has been suggested that the Church establish centers with a religious orientation for disturbed youth. In this way difficult youngsters could be isolated from the others. The parish church in an economically deprived area then could concentrate on its work with the better adjusted and more malleable children. There is much that is attractive about this proposal. Carefully selected and trained clergy, together with a competent staff of social workers, would be able to work in a more controlled situation with the gang-oriented youth and the delinquent. Such an institution could be a 'home away from home' for scores of kids. The experience of other efforts of this kind could be drawn upon and coordination with private and city agencies working in the same field would present a new and exciting challenge. It ought to be tried somewhere. But it would not be a parish.

A parish is made up of a number of redeemed sinners who live in a society which is in large measure unredeemed. The parish is the classical cell whose members are infiltrators into a world mainly hostile to the claims of the Gospel. Its mission is to the sinner. It is a

body of people under a divine directive which is to reach out in love to those whose lives are torn and mangled by personal and social sin. It seeks to draw into its fellowship those who do not belong to anything or anyone. It is a center of acceptance and relationships. It therefore does not, cannot, exist for itself. The parish clergy and laity exist for the purpose of praising God and preaching the Gospel of the love of this God to all men including the Knights. The object of the parish in the history of the community which it encompasses is peace, salvation, wholeness, unity, health. This objective is God's Who chooses to embody Himself in the person, the place and the thing, in order that men may be saved from sin and death.

A parish consists of a group of people who are in relation to each other on the levels of love and forgiveness. And since we never are in such a relationship *in vacuo*, there must be a center, a point in time and space, where love and forgiveness may have their way. Therefore, there is a House about which the life of the parish revolves. It is the parish church which also is a house of hospitality. A parish is, in a real sense, a place. Its physical center may be a store front or a Gothic structure. It doesn't matter so long as a climate of acceptance and forgiveness is felt to be present and appropriable by all who enter.

This will be the case only if the clergy, who themselves are the core of the parish, accept this as the real and inner meaning of 'parish' and also act it out in terms of their acceptance of others.

The Knights could not have existed for long with us had the Mission not been to some degree a place where love acted in their behalf. They discovered a group of

people that sincerely cared. They came to feel accepted in the *in spite of* sense—in spite of their anti-social behavior. They learned that we hated the sins and not the sinner.

Our lack was in not accepting enough, in not caring enough, in the not hating the sins enough to make our love for the confused and bewildered become the bearer of healing reality for the Knights.

This Mission of Trinity Parish, then, because it stands in a neighborhood in dangerous transition, must act as Christ's mission to the bewildered, frightened and hostile. Through its life as a fellowship, through the sacraments and preaching, through the 'en-Christed,' to use Norman Pittenger's language, the Good News of God's love must reach the unloved and the rejected. The whole fellowship must move forward to this appointed task in that unity of purpose and understanding which Christ gives it. There must be a constant conversation between priests and people with respect to the task. Ways and means must be sought out by which this Christian sort of talking can go on—talking which comes to include the majority of the people of the parish.

People must come to understand that a parish not in tension is not, in our day, a Christian parish. One reason that makes this so, is that churches have lost their ultimate vision—save for such places as Montgomery, Alabama, or Americus, Georgia. There is really no conflict between the Church and 'the World.' There is nothing to fight about; there is no eschatological thinking—that is, the doctrine of the last things, of the ultimate end of life, has lost its relevance. The Lord and the *status quo* become one and the same. There is no crisis

through which the Kingdom of God enters into our history—personal or social. Who ever heard of a 'crisis' in most of our parishes?

More than not, the crisis is present but unrecognized. Whenever there is a rift in the human relations between persons or groups in a parish there is a crisis—the Advent of God in the Holy Eucharist is 'breaking through' although in a sometimes hidden way. Whenever there are people in a town designated as those 'on the other side of the tracks,' there is a crisis present. Whenever a brown-skinned person is given the cold shoulder in a parish church, the time of crisis has arrived. The web of love relationships has been broken and it is time for confession. And confession looks toward the End, the final Coming of the Son of Man surrounded by the angels. The time of crisis is the time of Judgment. And there never is a moment in the history of a parish when The Judgment is not present.

We must talk about this in our Mission. Talking is communicating. Life must touch life in our Incarnational way of looking at the existential situation. One Sunday morning a priest of our parish began his sermon with these words, 'Henry Street is in a hell of a mess!' He then launched into a discussion of the renewed vigor with which dope was being pushed on our street. He talked about our Christian responsibility to report any information we might have about pushers. He discussed the importance of our receiving back into the parish any young people returning from treatment at the Narcotics Hospital. After the Eucharist our people discussed the message of the sermon at the coffee hour. It was the Church and the World again! But here the Church must take the World into its arms while still continuing to

fight it. In plain words, these poor kids, hooked by the drug habit, must be helped by us all. 'Turning it all over to the social workers' is not enough, as any good social worker will testify.

Another time we all heard the cry for help from St. Peter's School for teenagers in South Africa. We talked about it; it was another crisis. Our people took to the streets with tin cans and begged for money for this Christian outpost in a land where the light of Christ's Gospel shines but dimly. Some of the Knights stood in front of Old Trinity on Wall Street with a cross and pictures of Father Huddleston in back of them and asked for money. But before we took to the streets, we talked about it. We understood each other. We prayed.

The parish will not accept the Knights unless the people have heard the Gospel and are given opportunity to talk through what they have heard. The really important agreement in a parish family is not about ceremonial; it is about receiving the sinner and 'fighting' the World. When there is no tension present can we be sure that this is being done?

The parish must accept the Knights. It is a crisis in which the Kingdom comes. And when Chris, who is a Knight, was baptized, the Lord came in all His Glory—the Glory which Chris shared that Easter Even. And as the Knights and our people stood about the Font the Glory shone on them. What a fantastic thing—to share in the Glory of God!

Epilogue

This is not the end of the story; it is merely the end of as much as can be put between the covers of a book. The story cannot end as long as hundreds of children pass through St. Augustine's and St. Christopher's each year; it cannot end as long as there are people who need help. It cannot end as long as God is provided with a witness.

At the start I said that this would not be a pretty story. It will never be a pretty story because, year after year, new people will move through its pages—new people needing God's transforming love.

Then why go on?

There is no earthly answer to that question—but there *is* an answer. If we hold fast to our profession as sons, God Himself, through Jesus Christ our Lord, has promised us the victory. And it is in this promise that the Church awaits: redeeming the time hour by hour, day by day, year by year, soul by soul—until our faith shall be lost in sight and God shall be all in all.

Glossary

A FAIR ONE—A clean fight (no friend helping out, no sticks, knives, etc.).

A SET—A dance.

BE-BOP—Always ready to start trouble, looking for a fight, without his people one of the most peaceful guys you can find.

BOP—To go down and have it out with some other club.

BROAD—A girl

BURNING—The act of shooting with a gun.

CALL IT ON—Means that it's understood one club is going to fight the other.

CAT—A person, most likely a boy.

CHICKEN—Scared to do what has been proposed.

COOL—Conservative, calm, smooth, nothing can move you.

FAYS—White guys

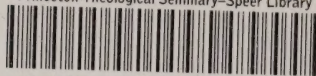
FAGGOT—A mama's boy (a homo).

FISH—Similar to the Grind, but less friction.

- GRIND—A dance with the movement of the hips swaying side to side, back and forth in time with the music.
- JIVE—Pretending to do or say something but not actually doing so.
- JUNKIE—A user of narcotics, most of the time looking weary, and scratches often.
- MAIN-LINE—To be taking dope in the main artery of the arm.
- OLD LADY—Your girl friend.
- PACKING—To carry a gun with you.
- PAD—Your house or anyone else's house.
- PEOPLE—Your friends, your boys who will go down with you.
- PIECE—A gun of some kind (zip gun, homemade, 22 cal., etc.)
- POT—A drug called marijuana, used in reefers.
- PRES—The president of a club.
- REP—Reputation, many clubs today are going on the rep made by the older fellows.
- RUMBLE—The actual fight between two (clicks) clubs.
- SMACK—Heroin, a very harmful narcotic.
- SOUNDING—Most of time it is an embarrassing statement about you, or your parents.
- SQUARE—A person who is not up-to-date on the happenings.
- STUFF—Your equipment used in a Rumble (guns, knives, sticks, etc.).
- TO DUMP—To beat up badly, kicking, stomping, etc.
- TO PAT DOWN—To be searched.
- TO RAT—Squeal on someone.
- TURF—Territory of some gang, or yours.
- TURKEY—Not a faggot but most of the time always backs out of things.
- WAR COUNCILLOR—Person who has a big say-so whether the club fights or not.
- WEEDS—A reefer (a long skinny cigarette made of marijuana).

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